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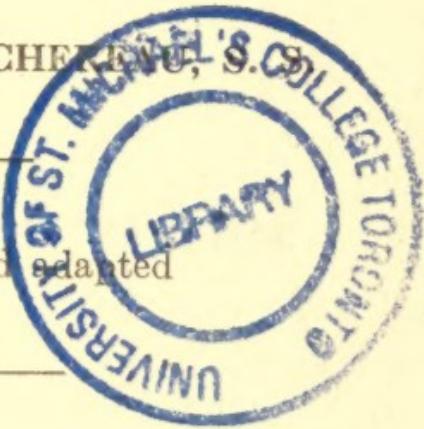
FOR THE USE OF

SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS

BY

Very Rev. L. BRANCHER

Translated and adapted



VOLUME II

CHRISTIAN VIRTUES

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MORNING PRAYERS

Benedicta sit sancta et individua Trinitas, nunc et semper, et per infinita sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

I adore thee, most august Majesty, one God, in three persons; I adore thy divine perfections incomprehensible to men and angels. Being nothing of myself and unable to honor thee as thou deservest to be honored, I offer thee all the homage and praise which thy incarnate Word offers for me in heaven and upon earth, and with my whole heart, I unite in all that his Holy Spirit operates for thy glory in his members. Most holy and most adorable Trinity, suffer me, through Jesus Christ, our mediator with thee, and by the grace of his Holy Spirit, to offer thee my feeble tribute of homage.

ACT OF ADORATION

Eternal Father, I adore thee as my Creator; I revere that boundless love and goodness which induced thy supreme Majesty to look down upon a less than nothing, and to bring me into existence. Eternal Word I adore thee as my Redeemer who, equal to thy Father, didst, in the womb of thy

mother, make thyself like unto us, taking upon thyself the form of a servant, living in poverty and dying in ignominy, to rise again in glory like unto that of thy Father, in order to teach us to live penitently, and to resign ourselves submissively to our sentence of death, with the full assurance of being made, by the resurrection, partakers of the glory of the children of God. Divine Spirit, I adore thee, the sanctifier of my soul, who dost consume sin in my heart by the fire of thy holy love, and dost descend continually into this abyss of iniquity, my heart, in order that by breathing into it that life-giving holiness which thou dost draw from the bosom of the Father and the Son, thou mayest make me worthy of being associated with them in their glory.

ACT OF THANKSGIVING

Eternal Father, I thank thee for having with such great love created me; having with so much patience borne with me in spite of my transgressions, and especially for having preserved me during the past night and given me this day in which to serve and honor thee. Son of God, I thank thee for having by the labors of thy life and the sufferings of thy death preserved me a thousand times from hell, and merited for me all the blessings which are found in thy Church. Divine Spirit, I thank thee for having deigned to infuse so many gifts and graces into my soul and for having so often begotten me anew by thy sanctifying grace, notwithstanding all the contempt I have shown for thy blessings.

ACT OF CONTRITION

Pardon, I beseech thee, Eternal Father, the wretched use I have made of the body and the soul which thou hast given me with so much goodness, and hast preserved with so much mercy. I beg forgiveness, O Son of God, for having profited so little by the holy example of thy life, by the counsels of thy holy Gospel, and by the graces of all thy holy Sacraments. Divine Spirit, forgive me the contempt which I have shown for thy inspirations, for thy lights and for that lively repentance which it hath pleased thee to excite in my soul.

ACT OF OBLATION

Eternal Father, I offer thee all the actions of this day, and I renounce all the self-satisfaction I might feel in them. Eternal Word, I offer thee all my thoughts and words, and beforehand I condemn all that are vain and useless. Spirit of God, I consecrate to thee all the affections of my heart, and I renounce all the irregular desires of nature.

ACT OF RESIGNATION

Eternal Father, I renounce all confidence in my own strength and give myself entirely to thee, that thou mayest be my strength and support. Son of God, I condemn all the presumption of my own

mind and give myself up entirely to thee, to be governed by thy wisdom alone. Divine Spirit, I sacrifice to thee all my natural inclinations, in order to follow the desires of sanctity which thou implantest in pious souls. Eternal Father, do thou perfect my soul; Son of God, do thou enlighten it; Holy Spirit, do thou direct it.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

I offer thee once more, O my God, my thoughts, my words, and my actions, in union with those of Jesus Christ, that they may be worthy of being received by thee; and I renounce every intention, but that which he would have, were he upon earth and in my place. I unite, O my God, with his Divine Spirit, who causes thee to be loved and adored by all the angels and saints, and who fills heaven and earth with holy praises of thee, that aided by that Holy Spirit I may join with all those creatures who honor thee, and especially with those who honor thee by mental prayer.*

Some may prefer the following shorter form of morning prayers.

Benedicta sit Sancta et Individua Trinitas, nunc et semper et per infinita sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

O Almighty and Eternal God: in union with all thy elect in heaven and on earth, I adore thee, I

* From the *Journée Chrétienne* of FATHER OLIER.

love thee, I praise and thank thee for all the gifts of nature and grace, which I have received from thy infinite goodness. I thank thee principally for having created me to thy image and likeness, and preserved me to this day: for having given thy only begotten Son to suffer death for me on the cross, and to wash away my sins with his most precious blood. I thank thee for having called me to the faith of the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; for having so often pardoned me my sins, for having watched over me during this past night, and preserved me from a sudden death and from all the other evils which might have befallen me, had I not been protected by thy merciful and watchful Providence.

Would that I could make thee, O Lord, in return for all thy mercies, an offering of gratitude and love proportionate to their number and greatness. Of myself indeed I am nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing worthy of thee. But since, by a wonderful device of thy wisdom and love, I have access to thy majesty through Christ my Savior, I humbly offer thee, in union with him and through his Sacred Heart, whatever I possess, my body, my senses, all the powers of my soul. I firmly purpose by thy divine grace not to think, say or do anything unworthy of one called to the priesthood.

Help me, O Lord, to curb my evil inclinations, and so guide and sustain me in all things that every thought, word and action of mine may tend to thy greater glory, the sanctification of my soul and the good of those around me.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

Domine Deus Omnipotens, qui ad principium
hujus diei nos pervenire fecisti, tua nos hodie salva
virtute, ut in hac die ad nullum declinemus pecca-
tum, sed semper ad tuam justitiam faciendam nostra
procedant eloquia, dirigantur cogitationes et opera.
Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

Angele Dei, qui custos es mei, me tibi commis-
sum pietate superna illumina, custodi, rege, et
guberna. Amen.

Dominus nos benedicat et ab omni malo defendat
et ad vitam perducat æternam; et fidelium animæ
per misericordiam Dei requiescant in pace. Amen.

PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION

Before beginning meditation, there are always three things to be done:

1. *To place ourselves in the presence of God by two acts, one of faith, the other of adoration.*

My God, I firmly believe, on the authority of thy word, that thou art here present, and in the inmost recesses of my heart, as truly as that thou art in heaven, in the midst of saints and angels. O, Sovereign Majesty, my God, before whom the whole universe is but as dust, I prostrate myself before thee, acknowledging that thou art my Creator and that I am thy creature and thus I offer the homage of my whole being to thy supreme Majesty.

2. *To acknowledge ourselves unworthy of appearing before God, and thus to excite ourselves to contrition.*

I confess, O my God, that I am unworthy to appear in thy presence. I acknowledge that I do not deserve that thou shouldst look upon me, on account of my nothingness, my vileness and my numberless sins. Yea, Lord, I am filled with confusion at the sight of my own misery caused by my own sins;

but I do heartily repent having offended thee. I am sorry, because thou art infinitely good, and because sin is so displeasing to thee. Prostrate at thy feet, I implore thy grace that I may be converted, and may do penance before thee.

Confiteor, etc.

3. To unite ourselves to Jesus Christ in order to appear before his Father in his name; and implore the aid of the Holy Ghost for our meditation.

Not in my own name, O my God, have I the blindness to address my prayer to thee; it is in the name of thy well-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; all my confidence is in him. Clothed in his merits I present myself before thee, to implore thy grace, like Jacob of old clad in the garments of his elder brother, presenting himself before his father to ask his blessing. I know that of myself I can have neither a good thought nor even a desire that shall conduce to my salvation. Have mercy on me, O God! I humbly confess my nothingness and my wretchedness; I renounce my own thoughts and my earthly affections, and give myself up entirely to thy divine Spirit. Come then, O Holy Ghost! enlighten my darkness; inflame my lukewarmness; strengthen my weakness. I desire to make this meditation by thy lights, by thy impulse, and under thy guidance.

Holy Virgin, mother of divine wisdom and purest love, help me, I beseech Thee, to obtain this grace.

After Meditation

O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni, et vive in famulis tuis, in spiritu sanctitatis tuæ, in plenitudine virtutis tuæ, in perfectione viarum tuarum, in veritate virtutum tuarum, in communione mysteriorum tuorum: dominare omni adversæ potestati in Spiritu tuo ad gloriam Patris. Amen.

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VIRTUES

I

FAITH

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the Holy Trinity as the principal object and the source of our faith. It is the supernatural light of faith that makes us Christians. We will thank almighty God for this inestimable gift of his mercy.
- II. Faith is firm adherence to the truths revealed by God and taught by holy mother Church. We will consider the value, the necessity, and the fruitfulness of the act of faith.

1. *Its value.* By it we pay homage to God, acknowledging that he is the source of all truth. We sacrifice our reasoning faculty by accepting on God's word truths not attained by our unaided reason. This is at the same time the noblest exercise of reason itself.

2. *Its necessity.* God imposes on us the obligation of accepting the truths which he has revealed. No amount of learning or degree of virtue is an acceptable substitute. *Without faith,* says St. Paul, *it is impossible to please God.*

3. *Its fruitfulness.* The whole Church is a development growing out of faith in Jesus Christ.

Under the divine influence of faith, our most insignificant acts become supernatural. By it our whole life is elevated and transformed.

III. We will ask God to safeguard our faith, the precious gift of his bounty. We will try to realize the need of guarding this treasure most zealously. We will examine ourselves to see whether our studies or other influences have altered the simplicity of our faith.

We will resolve:

1. To thank God often for calling us to the faith;
2. To guard against whatever would weaken our faith;
3. Every day to repeat the act of faith.

Lord, increase our faith.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Holy Trinity, not only as the principal object of our faith, but also as the source of this divine gift.

Our heavenly Father prepared for us the gift of faith from eternity and sent his beloved Son into the world to reveal the divine truths of faith.

The incarnate Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is *the true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into*

this world,¹ gave us the light of reason which distinguishes us as men, but in the supernatural order he added the light of faith that makes us Christians. *I am come a light into the world.²*

And the Holy Spirit by his grace influences our will and begets in us that firm adherence to revealed truth; and this we call faith.

Let us praise and bless almighty God and thank him for the inestimable gift of faith which we ourselves have not merited but which God in his infinite mercy has graciously bestowed upon us.

How much greater reason we have to be thankful to God when we consider that he has not thus favored all men. We find in the world to-day whole nations still in darkness. Even in regions where faith has spread its light, how many eyes are closed to the light, how many refuse to accept the truth that it brings to us! Thanking God, then, for this gift which we treasure so lightly, let us endeavor to better appreciate its true worth.

¹ JOHN 1⁹

² JOHN 12⁴⁶

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Faith is firm adherence to the truths revealed by God and taught by holy mother Church. We will consider its value, its necessity, its fruitfulness.

1. *The value of the act of faith.* By the adherence with which we cling to revealed truth we pay homage to God's infinite knowledge and supreme veracity. We thereby acknowledge that he is the source of all truth. *All things are naked and open to his eyes,*¹ and that he can neither be deceived nor deceive us. The act of faith is thus a religious act by which we glorify the perfection of God.

It is also a most meritorious sacrifice. What constitutes man's glory, what raises him above other earthly creatures is his reasoning faculty, the gift of God, and a participation in his infinite knowledge, enabling man to contemplate the truth. But the act of faith is a sacrifice of this noble faculty to God.

In accepting firmly the truth of a revealed mystery which he can not understand, the Christian places divine wisdom above his own fallible reason which he thereby confesses to

¹ HEB. 4¹⁸

be weak and limited and which he truly sacrifices to God. When we support patiently and without complaint the sufferings with which God visits us, when we accept them as imposed by him, do we not sacrifice our body? And when, to obey his commands, we fulfil some precept of his law, do we not sacrifice our will to his? So too when, on his word, we believe some truth that we can neither understand nor explain, we sacrifice our reason.

This act by no means degrades man's dignity. On the contrary, it is the noblest exercise of reason itself. For what is more reasonable than to submit and subordinate the feeble, circumscribed power of our intellect to the infinite, uncreated reason of God in which we should recognize the supreme and infallible truth?

2. *The necessity of the act of faith.* When God reveals any truths to man, he imposes on us at the same time the strict obligation of unhesitating acceptance of and adherence to these truths. This perfect submission of our intellect is his due and we can not withhold it without offending his sovereign truthfulness. Should a man, however eminent in authority or however well-informed, offer us his teach-

ing, we could properly, before believing it, examine and discuss it, admit what appears to us as certain, reject what seems false, and remain in doubt about what is not conclusively proven. This is our right. For every man is fallible and liable to error. On the other hand, we must believe God on his own authority. Whether our reason grasps his revelations or whether they remain impenetrable mysteries, it suffices for us to know that God has revealed them; we are then bound to assent.

The act of faith is absolutely necessary for a Christian. *Without faith, says St. Paul, it is impossible to please God. For he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and is a rewarder to them that seek him.*¹ From these words it is clear that faith is an essential condition of the Christian life; in fact it is the very foundation of the spiritual edifice. It is the only entrance to the sheepfold of Christ.

If I have not faith, I am no longer a member of the Church, and I participate neither in her life nor in the spiritual blessings at her disposal; I can not perform the smallest supernatural act.

¹ HEB. 11⁶

Moreover, our act of faith must extend to every truth of religion, for we have them all on the same authority. To deny one revealed truth is to destroy that faith without which we can not please God. As one of God's saints has well said: *We should dread the death of our body less than the loss of our faith.*¹

3. *The fruitfulness of the act of faith.* Did not faith strengthen the martyrs, lead the hermits into solitude; did it not render the apostles zealous, the saints holy? Is not the whole Church a development growing out of faith in Jesus Christ? When enlightened and sustained by faith, the human will is ready to undertake and suffer anything.

Faith is especially fruitful in the supernatural value that it places on our every action. Our most heroic deeds, if performed without faith, are of no value or merit before God. But, on the contrary, under the divine influence of faith, our most insignificant acts become supernatural and, if performed in the grace of Jesus Christ, become meritorious.

Thus by faith our whole life is elevated and transformed. It is in the supernatural world what the sun is in the natural; it illumines,

¹ ST. BERNARD, *Epist. ad Henr. Senon.*

it fertilizes, it quickens. As the soul without it is unprofitable, so in possession of this divine gift is it rich and productive. In faith we find the principle of holiness in this life and of glory in the next.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, do not deprive me of this precious source of so many blessings, this generous gift of thy bounty. As I was born in the faith and grew up in its divine light, I came to regard it as a matter of course, as something naturally due to me even as the air I breathe.

My vocation to the true faith, whether in baptism or by subsequent conversion, imposes on me the strict obligation to preserve this gift of God most faithfully in the depths of my heart and to avoid whatever would weaken it; and since even the most venerable dogmas of our faith are publicly questioned and ridiculed and declared to be unreasonable, I must guard this divine treasure most zealously. Living in an atmosphere of incredulity, we should fortify ourselves against the disastrous effects of modern scepticism.

Has biblical and theological study altered the simplicity of my faith? Have I substituted reason for faith or forgotten the divine origin of revelation? Have I always kept in mind that adherence to dogmas of faith should rest on the authority of God as taught by his Church, and not on the arguments which reason adduces to support those truths and to persuade those who have not the light of faith? Do I vigorously resist every temptation to unbelief? And do I by frequent acts of faith attest my acceptance of truths divinely revealed?

I resolve therefore:

1. To thank God often for calling me to the faith;
2. To guard against whatever would weaken my faith;
3. Every day to repeat the act of faith.

Lord, increase our faith.¹

¹ LUKE 17⁵

II

LIVING BY FAITH

SUMMARY

I. We will adore Jesus Christ, the perfect model for those who form their rule of life from the truths which faith teaches us. His rule was always the will of his heavenly Father. And we will admire the saints of God who looked upon the revealed truths of Christianity not as the object of speculative study and abstract belief but as a practical rule of life to be followed and obeyed.

II. We will consider what is to live by faith, the advantages of that life, and how to live by faith.

1. *What is to live by faith.* It is the conformity of all our acts to the prescriptions which the light of faith adds to that of reason. We shall seem to do what other men do, but we will do it all in a different way.

2. *The advantages of living by faith.* It assures strength and peace to the soul in the midst of the trials of this present life. And it gives a supernatural and meritorious value to acts otherwise indifferent or insignificant.

3. *The means to live by faith.* The means par excellence are prayer and meditation. For we are thereby brought face to face with the great truths revealed by God.

III. We will examine ourselves to see whether our faith is living and practical. After reflecting that we have special need of an active faith, we will ask our blessed Lord for the help of his grace to vivify our faith.

We will resolve:

1. To apply ourselves more diligently to prayer, the essential condition for the life of faith;
2. To try to act under the influence of faith.
My just man liveth by faith.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Jesus Christ, the most perfect model for those souls who have risen above the world of sense and are dead to self-seeking but who form their rule of life from the truths which faith teaches us. This same divine Master, in all the details of his mortal life, completely responded to every inspiration of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him; his rule was indeed the will of his heavenly Father, the end of his every act the glory of God and the salvation of men.

Let us consider the life of the Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph, and reflect upon their humble submission to God and their complete abandonment to the action of the Holy Spirit who dwelt within them.

And let us admire the life of faith in the holy men now blessed in heaven. Are they not rewarded with this name of blessed because while on earth theirs was the life of faith, which, according to St. Paul, is the mark of a just man? *My just man*, he says, *liveth by faith.*¹

The saints of God looked upon the revealed truths of Christianity not as a simple theory, the object of speculative study and abstract belief, but as a practical rule of life to be followed, a holy law to be faithfully obeyed. Their thoughts, judgments, and acts were all performed in the light of faith, which indeed guided their will, inspired their undertakings and furnished the motives of every important act. Their life was the genuine expression of their faith.

Now, the Holy Spirit who inspired and directed the saints dwells within us, inciting us to perform works of holiness. After their example we must be not speculative but practical Christians in whom faith is truly a principle of life. During this meditation let us implore God's mercy for this grace.

¹ HEB. 10³⁸

II. CONSIDERATIONS

That we may be more eager to live by faith as we are called upon to do as Christians and still more strictly on account of our priestly vocation, let us consider: what is to live by faith; what are the advantages of that life; and how to live by faith.

1. *What is to live by faith.* We have in us a threefold principle of life: the senses, reason, and faith.

He who lives the life of the senses seeks pleasure only in the external and baser enjoyments. He sees and pursues only pleasure and is determined in everything that it does by nothing but the prospect of pleasure. St. Paul calls him *animalis homo*.

But above this animal existence is the life of reason, whose rule is to seek the good and the true in so far as made known to us by our natural reason. This rational principle operates in man, not according to blind passion, but according to order and the moral law.

The life of faith is the rational life elevated, ennobled, perfected. It is the conformity of all our acts to the prescriptions which the supernatural light of faith adds to that of

reason. To be a man of faith, I must therefore realize in every act of my practical life the truths and maxims taught by revelation; I must consult the supernatural light in all my undertakings and in my thoughts, my judgments, my decisions, I must be guided by the light of faith.

In the physical order, nourishment, assimilated by our organism, penetrates every part of our body, renewing and vivifying it. So, too, our soul may be said to live on faith if this divine principle as a spiritual food is united to our soul, permeating and modifying its acts and tendencies. By its influence, faith gives to our spiritual life a new form and dignity. We shall seem to do what other men do, but we will do it all in a different way. Apparently our life will in no wise differ from theirs, yet in reality it will possess an altogether different character.

2. *The advantages of living by faith.* Living by faith gives strength and firmness and constancy to the soul in the midst of the trials of this present life. Pagan wisdom had conceived the ideal virtuous man as inaccessible to trouble and worry, calm in the midst of an excited, eager, feverish world. The Christian

soul living by faith, convinced that God rules all things and that nothing happens without his knowledge and permission, is neither sad in the present life nor anxious for the future. It is faith that tells us of God's providence. To the mind of a man leading the life of faith, Providence is the infinitely good and knowing God who sees and governs the universe, the tender and merciful Father who is solicitous for his children. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father.*¹ God sees our trials; in fact, he permits them, for they are the road by which he leads the elect to their blessed reward. *The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayers.*² What peace and joyful security the Christian finds in this thought! By faith we see in our neighbor the image of God, a living member of Jesus Christ. We exercise our charity for the sake of Christ. *As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.*³

In one who lives by faith, acts in themselves utterly indifferent become supernatural and

¹ MATTH. 10²⁹

² I PETER 3¹²

³ MATTH. 25⁴⁰

meritorious. The holiness of the saints was not in their exceptional deeds of heroism but in the supernatural character of their ordinary acts. Prompted by divine grace they did everything for God. Nothing was useless, no occasion of merit was lost; for faith, which directed their lives, gave to every act a supernatural value. So it is with everyone who lives by faith.

3. *How to live by faith.* We meet many souls who have faith but who are not living by faith. And what is the cause? Theirs is a languishing faith, without power and activity. Although strictly speaking we do not admit of degrees in the certitude of faith, yet we recognize differences in the intensity with which we adhere to the truths which faith teaches. We have the habit of faith. But are there not times when that faith, ordinarily hidden in the depths of our soul, is in some way strengthened and exalted, when we feel a strong desire to make the revealed truths our rules of conduct? Then indeed we have a living faith.

The means par excellence to acquire the habit of living by faith are prayer and meditation; for we are thereby brought face to face with the great truths revealed by God, we

consider what they imply, we make personal application of their teaching, we realize the necessity of heeding their voice, in short we resolve to obey their precepts and to cherish whatever they counsel. It is this practical conviction which produces a living faith in us.

We are well aware that the saints, whose living faith was exemplary, were all men of prayer. For some of them prayer had become the habitual element in which they lived.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Thanks to thy merciful goodness, my God, I possess the true faith. But is it in me a veritable principle of life? Does it inspire and control my judgments, my acts, my words? Are its maxims the measure by which I value the events of my life, its successes and failures?

My God, I must confess that my faith has been more dead than alive, speculative rather than practical. Though I would not deny a single dogma that it teaches nor a duty that it imposes, yet do I not act as though I did not believe? My life contradicts my belief.

Thou, my Savior, hast given me the gift of

faith; thou alone canst increase it in me and give it that intensity which makes it practical. I have more need of an active faith than have the simple faithful for I am called by thy grace to exercise functions that are founded in faith. My whole life ought, in a special manner and for obvious reasons, to be an authentic profession of faith. Should not the priest be above all a man living by faith? Increase our faith. My Lord Jesus, place in my soul that living and ardent faith which has made apostles and martyrs out of apparently ordinary mortals and without which my ministry will not be fruitful.

I resolve therefore:

1. To apply myself more diligently to prayer, the essential condition for one who wishes to live by faith;
2. To try to act under the influence of faith.
*My just man liveth by faith.*¹

¹ HEB. 10³⁸

III

CONFESSTION OF FAITH

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Word made flesh, coming into the world that he might bear witness to the truth. We will do reverence to the apostles and martyrs who confessed their faith in Jesus Christ.

II. We will consider that:

1. *Every Christian is obliged to make outward profession of his faith.* St. Paul says: *With the heart, we believe unto justice; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.* God wishes faith to direct both our interior and our exterior life. *Let your light shine before men,* says our Savior. *Every one therefore that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.* The whole life of a priest should be a constant profession of his faith.

2. *How we are to profess our faith.* For those who have the talent, it is a duty to explain and defend the faith by their writings. Besides the obligation diligently to instruct our Catholic people in the doctrines of their holy faith, we have now in this country a providential opportunity to bring the faith before the minds of our non-Catholic neighbors. There is another profession of faith still more practical and more necessary—the fearless practice of Christianity.

III. We will look into our past to find out whether we have sometimes failed to make open profession of our faith. Have we in word or act been influenced by human respect or other improper motives rather than by the conviction of our conscience founded in faith? We will pray to Jesus Christ to enliven and strengthen our faith by his grace.

We will resolve:

1. To defend the cause of God and of religion by our words whenever there is need;
2. In our acts never weakly to yield to human respect.

With the heart, we believe unto justice; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Word made flesh, coming into the world that he might bear witness to the truth. *For this was I born, and for this came I into the world,* he said to Pilate; *that I should give testimony to the truth.*¹ And during his whole life he was indeed ever faithful to this divine mission which his Father had entrusted to him. In the towns and villages of Judea he fearlessly proclaimed the eternal truths of his heavenly doctrine. *He that sent me, is true: and the things I have heard of him,*

¹ JOHN 18²⁷

*these same I speak in the world.*¹ Even before his bitter judges did he preach the truth, although he knew it would furnish the pretext for his condemnation and death. On Calvary's cross he rendered supreme testimony to the truths which he taught. He did not conceal the light of divine truth; but he spread it broadcast. *I am come a light into the world.*²

The apostles, commissioned to preach the gospel of his kingdom to the whole world, went forth and with courageous zeal bore testimony to their faith in Christ. Their voice could not be silenced by the threats of the synagogue. *If it be just in the sight of God, to hear you rather than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*³ And what has been the result of their fearless confession of faith and that of other Christian missionaries? They speak to the Jews and the Gentiles, to the Greeks and the barbarians; and, in imitation of Jesus Christ, their exemplar and master in all things, they do not hesitate to suffer death to confirm the truth of what they preach.

¹ JOHN 8²⁶

² JOHN 12⁴⁶

³ ACTS 4¹⁹⁻²⁰

Besides the example of our Lord's first apostles we have the countless multitude of martyrs who have heroically confessed Jesus Christ in the face of the most frightful sufferings and who have sacrificed their lives rather than renounce their faith.

Let us glorify our Lord who has strengthened them by his grace to confess their faith on every occasion. He wishes that we too should confess our faith in him, we whom he has called to be his friends and co-workers, to whom he says: *You shall be witnesses unto me.*¹

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Every Christian is obliged to make outward confession of his faith. Let us consider this truth and also reflect upon the manner in which we should profess our faith.

1. *Every Christian is obliged to make outward profession of his faith.* St. Paul says: *With the heart, we believe unto justice; but, with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.*² These words clearly establish our double duty regarding our faith: to believe

¹ ACTS 1⁸

² ROM. 10¹⁰

firmly and to make confession of that faith. Does not our blessed Lord himself declare this latter obligation no less plainly? *Every one therefore, he says, that shall confess me before men, I will also confess him before my Father who is in heaven.* And he adds: *But he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.*¹ *He that shall be ashamed of me, and of my words the Son of man also will be ashamed of him, when he shall come in the glory of his Father.*²

If we do not make proper confession of our faith, we offend almighty God who gave us the divine gift of faith not that we should conceal it. *You are the light of the world.*³ And again Christ says: *Let your light shine before men.*⁴ He wishes faith to direct both our interior and our exterior life so that men, seeing the work that it inspires, will glorify it in us. But a man who conceals his faith, is ashamed to profess Christ's doctrine, to follow his divine teaching, to acknowledge

¹ MATTH. 10³²⁻³³

² MARK 8³⁸

³ MATTH. 5¹⁴

⁴ MATTH. 5¹⁶

that he belongs to Jesus. What an offense such a practice must be to God!

What is the motive of such conduct if not fear and human respect? Interiorly we adhere to Christ's religion and its maxims but we seem afraid to manifest that faith. Surely this weakness and pusillanimity is unworthy of a Christian, especially of a priest.

The priest is by his very title an apostle of the faith, by his ordination a teacher in the Church of God, by his vocation the intimate friend of Jesus Christ, by his office the exponent and interpreter of the Word Incarnate who came to spread over the earth that divine faith which the priest is called to preach by his words and deeds, but more especially by the conduct of his whole life which should be a constant profession of his faith. *For woe is unto me*, said St. Paul, *if I preach not the gospel.*¹ But if a minister of the Gospel is so weak as to hide his faith, if he is afraid to defend it when it is attacked, if he is lacking in fidelity to the cause entrusted to him, if he does not, as it were, identify himself with the interests of the faith, how can we calculate his guilt? Let every priest hearken to St. Paul's instruc-

¹ I COR. 9¹⁶

tions to Timothy: *Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season.*¹

2. *How we are to confess our faith.* In this our age and in this our country it is highly improbable that we will be called upon to sacrifice our lives in the confession of our faith. But before God we have certain obligations to our fellow-countrymen, both Catholic and Protestant. For those to whom God has given the talent there is a duty to explain and defend the faith by their writings, to instruct and fortify the faithful. God is giving us a grand opportunity to bring the faith before the minds of our non-Catholic neighbors. If we neglect this duty, ours will be the punishment of the unprofitable servant who buried his talent. And, unless we diligently instruct our Catholic people in the doctrines of their holy faith, carefully preparing them for the attacks that are being made upon it and that may come to their ears sooner or later, we will be held to strict account for the infidelity of many souls entrusted to our care. Let us not be foolhardy and imprudent, but let us not mistake cowardly timidity for prudent reserve.

¹ II TIM. 4²

There is another profession of faith more practical and more necessary than the apostleship of the pen or the pulpit, because the opportunity for it is presented to every one of us at almost every hour of the day, and because it is the most powerful and convincing manner of confessing our faith. It is the fearless practice of Christianity. As seminarians or as priests we are marked men; our speech and conduct are bound to exercise either a good or an evil influence upon those around us. Let us see to it, then, that our acts be such as become those who belong to God. Let us be truly men of God.

Even in the community life of the seminary we may violate this obligation to confess our faith. Of course we do not blush at being called Christians nor for practicing the piety which our fellow-seminarians practice. But sometimes, yielding to human respect, do we not blush when charged with being regular and fervent, with having a delicate conscience and taking the work of our sanctification too seriously? Owing to a false sense of manliness, do we take part in conversation that is disedifying or perhaps worse? But to act thus is to lack the courage to profess our belief in the truths which our faith teaches.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, have I not to reproach myself for having in the past sometimes failed to make open confession of my faith? Have I concealed the fact that I belong to Jesus Christ? Have I failed to sustain the maxims of the Gospel, condemning what they approve, and approving what they condemn? By silent consent or by outspoken approval have I acquiesced in the unchristian opinions that others may have expressed, whereas I should have manifested the principle of my faith to which I inwardly adhere? In short, have I in word or act been influenced by human respect or other improper motives rather than by the conviction of my own conscience?

My past experience tells me that I need thy grace, dear Lord, to enliven my faith so that I will be ready to profess and carry out its maxims whenever the occasion may arise.

I resolve:

1. To defend the cause of God and of religion by my words whenever there is need;
2. In my acts never weakly to yield to human respect.

With the heart, we believe unto justice; but with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.¹

¹ ROM. 10¹⁰

IV

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord Jesus, the perfect model of confidence in God. *Father . . . I knew that thou hearest me always.* His very last words on earth were these: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.* If we examine the conduct of those saints with whose lives we are most familiar, we are surprised at their spirit of resignation to divine Providence.

II. We will consider that reason, revelation, and experience teach us that we should place our confidence in almighty God.

1. *Reason teaches us to trust in God.* It points out that nothing takes place except by the order or permission of God and that whatever he wills or permits in our regard is inspired by love for us. Boundless power at the service of infinite love.

2. *Holy Writ teaches us to trust in God.* The Old Testament is a history of God's continual protection and guidance of his chosen people. But the New Testament tells us of the incarnation of his own beloved Son. *God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son.* Christ taught the world that God was a good and merciful Father

who deserved the most absolute confidence from his children.

3. *Our daily experience teaches us to trust in God.* By reflecting on our past, we will see again and again the finger of God directing the events of our life. *The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing.* This is especially true of our vocation to his holy priesthood.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have a real confidence in God. A soul thoroughly trusting in God is never disquieted over anything; no trials of any sort have power to disconcert it. In every undertaking it relies upon God's help. For it is *God that giveth the increase.* Are these our dispositions?

We will resolve:

1. Never to be discouraged, no matter what failures or disappointments we may have to face;
2. To have recourse to God in every trial and in every undertaking.

Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect model of confidence in God. From his birth into this world even to his last breath upon the cross he abandoned himself to his heavenly Father without reserve. When he prays it is with the perfect assurance

that he will be heard. *Father . . . I knew that thou hearest me always.*¹ At the Last Supper, before leaving this world, our blessed Savior entrusted to Providence the disciples whom he had received from the hands of his heavenly Father and whom he was about to leave orphans. *Holy Father, he prayed, keep them in thy name whom thou hast given me.*² And the very last words of his mortal life were these: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*³

If we examine the conduct of those saints with whose lives we are most familiar, do we not find these holy men placing the most admirable confidence in the paternal goodness of divine Providence, their resource in every need? We are astonished at the spirit of resignation with which they accept every trial and suffering of their lives. They know that God, even in sending us our severest trials, is moved by love for us.

It is the spirit of Jesus Christ dwelling in his saints that filled them with such great confidence in God; rendering them superior to

¹ JOHN 11⁴²

² JOHN 17¹¹

³ LUKE 23⁴⁶

the misfortunes and trials of this life. Let us ask Jesus Christ for the grace of this absolute trust in our heavenly Father and his.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The light of reason, the teaching of Holy Writ, and our daily experience, all tell us that we should place our whole confidence in almighty God.

1. *Reason teaches us to trust in God.* It points out two truths that lie at the very foundation of Christian confidence in our heavenly Father.

Nothing takes place except by the order or permission of God. God it is who created the world, who continues to sustain it, who governs it and preserves it in order and harmony. So all the power and life and activity that we find among creatures is there in virtue of a limited communication of the infinite power that God possesses, and it can be exercised only in dependence upon him who confers it. Not only, therefore, does God see all things, but he directs every activity, even the free will of men, in order to accomplish his own designs. Such is the extent of God's providen-

tial influence over the events in the world that, according to the word of our blessed Lord, not even a sparrow falls without the permission of our heavenly Father. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father.*¹

Whatever God wills or permits in our regard is inspired by his love for us. Everything is subject to his almighty power, and his omnipotence is directed and exercised by his infinite goodness. He created us and gave us life that some day we might enjoy the blessedness of possessing him. Such, then, is the end to which God's providence constantly directs the events of our life. Even his acts of apparent severity have their source in this goodness. It is through love that he sometimes visits us with affliction, yet the chastisements that he sends are all intended to promote our spiritual welfare: *My grace is sufficient for thee.*²

Boundless power at the service of infinite love, such is the God in whom we ought to trust. How absolute and unqualified should be our confidence! To him we should aban-

¹ MATTH. 10²⁹

² II COR. 12⁹

don ourselves without reserve; to him we should entrust our greatest interests.

*I can not fully confide in any one to bring me seasonable help in my necessities, save only in thee, my God. . . . Thou art my hope, my confidence, my comforter, and in all things most faithful. For men are subject to change, easily take offense, and on slight provocation withdraw their help and friendship. All seek the things that are their own; Thou designest only my salvation and profit, and turnest all things to my good.*¹

2. *Holy Writ teaches us to trust in God.* Is not the Old Testament a history of God's chosen people, of his continual protection and guidance, and of their great confidence in him? The entire history of the Jews under the Old Law might be summed up in these words of the Psalmist: *And he delivered them out of their distresses.*²

But God's solicitude for us as portrayed in the New Testament should inspire us with still greater trust in his providence. Here we see his beloved Son assume human flesh, spend over thirty years in our midst, and at last

¹ IMIT. III, 5^o

² Ps. 106^o

suffer and die for us. *God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son.*¹ Is not this unquestionable proof of God's love for us? And should not our confidence in almighty God be unbounded? *If God be for us, says St. Paul, who is against us? He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also, with him, given us all things?*²

We hear our Savior again exhorting us to trust without reserve in God and his holy providence. He reminds us that God is a good and merciful Father, solicitous for our welfare even though we have neglected him, even though we have sinned against him. *It is he, says the great apostle, who giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.*³

3. *Our daily experience teaches us to trust in God.* When I examine my own past and reflect how I have attained to my present position, I see again and again the finger of God directing the events of my life. Some events, which at the time of their occurrence seemed to me reverses, he has turned to good

¹ JOHN 3¹⁶

² ROM. 8³¹⁻³²

³ ACTS 17²⁵

account. Has not God favored me in many exceptional ways? Has he not singled me out to be the recipient of his special bounty in preference to many that I know, more worthy than myself? And should not this goodness fill me with confidence in his love? I have every reason to repeat over and over again the words of the Psalmist: *The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture. . . . He hath led me on the paths of justice, for his own name's sake. . . . And thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*¹

For a long time I have heard a divine voice calling me to God's service, I have been conscious that God wished me to be a priest. As time has gone on, this conviction has become more and more distinct, definite, and imperative. To this end has God's providence directed the circumstances of my past, turning apparent obstacles into real helps. By all these favors he has been soliciting my confidence. So I should never yield to discouragement or discontent. For surely God is with me.

¹ Ps. 22

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Let us examine ourselves to see whether we have a real confidence in God. Now, a soul genuinely and thoroughly trusting in God, knowing that nothing happens without the will or permission of a good and merciful Providence, is never disquieted nor troubled over anything. He is never the slave of anxious solicitude nor of depressing discouragement. Failure does not sadden him; temptations can not frighten him; calumny, misunderstanding, false charges, opposition, trials of any sort, have no power to disconcert him. For his confidence in God always assures him of divine protection and friendship.

The soul that really trusts in God trusts in him alone and in the help of his grace. In every undertaking he relies upon God's help, not on his own nor on any creature's. Indeed, he uses all the human means at his disposal but he well understands that these instruments are efficacious only if God bless and fructify their activity. *It is God that giveth the increase.*¹ So, in every trial and difficulty he has recourse to God and confidently implores his assistance.

¹ I COR. 3⁷

Are these our dispositions? Have we preserved peace of heart in the midst of trials? Have we been faithful always to seek the aid of God's grace in every undertaking? Or, on the contrary, is it true that we seldom have recourse to God? Do we not frequently act as if the entire success of our enterprises depended solely on ourselves and the means that our own industry or ingenuity may devise? Let us ask God to pardon our lack of confidence and to give us the grace to trust absolutely in his good providence.

Let us resolve:

1. Never to be discouraged, no matter what failures or disappointments we may have to face;
2. To have recourse to God in every trial and in every undertaking.

Cast thy care upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.¹

¹ Ps. 54²³

V

CONFIDENCE IN JESUS CHRIST

SUMMARY

- I. We will admire holy mother Church entrusting herself and all her interests confidently to the protection of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Holy Sacrifice, in her public prayers, and in the sacramental rites all is done in the name of our blessed Savior and through his merits.
- II. From Christ's life on earth, his life in heaven, and his life in the Eucharist, we will draw the motives that urge us to place our trust and confidence in him.
 1. *His mortal life on earth.* Every act of that life reveals the great love of his sacred heart for us. *He went about doing good.* He died for us. His sacrifice on Calvary is the climax of a God-man's love for man.
 2. *His glorious life in heaven.* For our interests he ascended into heaven. *It is expedient to you that I go; for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you.* The sacrifice of Christ did not end with the tragedy of the cross but is continued eternally in heaven.
 3. *His sacramental life on the altar.* The Eucharist is par excellence the sacrament of Christ's love for souls. By means of this sacrament, our

divine Master has found a way to continually dwell among us familiarly accessible to all.

III. We will confess that we have not trusted in our divine Friend and Master with sufficient confidence. And we will ask of him the grace to practice absolute trust in so powerful and kind a Savior.

We will resolve:

1. In temptation to rely more trustingly on Jesus Christ;
2. In all our prayers to abandon ourselves to Jesus Christ.

Per Christum, cum Christo, in Christo.

I. ADORATION

How admirable is the trust which holy mother Church places in our Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing in him the throne of divine grace, the propitiatory victim offered to God for sin, the great high priest who stands between God and man, adoring, expiating, praying, offering thanks in our name. The Church knows well that from his mediation it is every divine gift proceeds and that all its strength and hope is derived from that same source. With how great faith, therefore, and love and unshakable confidence holy mother Church has recourse to our blessed Savior: She is fulfilling her divine mission among men

with her gaze constantly fixed on Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with her all days, to strengthen her against every danger, to remove every obstacle from her path, to defend her against all her enemies. Without fear or doubt she entrusts herself confidently to his guidance.

In her cult the Church is engaged principally in these three things: sacrifice, by which she renders glory to God; public prayer, by which she implores his help; the sacramental rites, by which she sanctifies the souls of men. But in the Holy Sacrifice it is Jesus Christ whom the Church offers to God, at once both priest and victim, confidently assured of the efficacy of this divine sacrifice; in public prayer, it is in the name of Jesus Christ and by his powerful mediation that the Church addresses her supplications to God; when she confers a sacrament, she is applying to souls the merits of our blessed Lord. Everything in the Church is done in Jesus Christ and through Jesus Christ. And in the sacred liturgy the name of our Savior is praised and adored and repeatedly invoked. Through this divine mediator the worship of the Church ascends to God.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the motives that urge us to place complete confidence in Jesus Christ, and these we will draw from his mortal life on earth, his glorious life in heaven, and his sacramental life on our altars.

1. *Jesus Christ in his mortal life on earth.* Every act of that life reveals the great love of his sacred heart. Does not his entire life invite us to place full confidence in his love? He entered our midst with the ordinary weakness of infancy and grew up like any other boy, passing the last years of his life in such a manner as was best calculated to win our love and dispel any lurking doubt.

Do we not feel drawn towards him when we contemplate the simplicity and poverty of his life, the readiness, nay the eagerness with which he welcomed all who approached to seek his favor? Is not his life among men well summed up by St. Peter when he says that Christ *went about doing good*?¹ He cured the sick, and the dead he raised to life. With bounteous hand he spread his gifts about him. Every affliction, every distress, every suffering

¹ ACTS 10³⁸

moved his heart and aroused his pity. When the blind man on the road to Jericho called out: *Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me;* and when many rebuked him, that he might hold his peace, our blessed Lord himself called him that he might be cured. Never was he deaf to the prayer of a needy suppliant.

But to understand the extent of Christ's love, to realize in a way its unfathomable depth, we must follow him along the way of the cross even to the scene on Calvary. Let us reflect upon his self-immolation, this climax of a God-man's love for man. Can we measure the love that was manifested by this supreme sacrifice? At least we should not doubt his readiness to hear every petition.

We should recall those parables in which our divine Master teaches us what sort of love he has for us, such as the story of the prodigal son, the good shepherd, the good Samaritan.

Then, too, we have the assurance of his own words: *Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.¹* He invites our confidence when he says: *Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you.²*

¹ JOHN 14¹

² MATTH. 11²⁸

2. Jesus Christ in his glorious life in heaven. Whether suffering on earth or reigning in heaven, Christ it is through whom God comes to us and through whom we go to God. When he was about to leave the earth and return to his heavenly Father, he did not say to his apostles: "I have labored for you and it is right that now I should find rest; I have endured torment and hardship and now I deserve to enjoy the reward which my sufferings have merited." But in testimony of his continued solicitude for them, he said: *If I shall go, and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself; that where I am, you also may be.¹ It is expedient to you that I go: for if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.²* For their own interests, then, for our interests, he ascended into heaven.

What a great encouragement Christ's glorious life in heaven should be for us who are struggling and suffering here below! For he is enjoying the same blissful eternity that will be our reward if only we are faithful to the end. *To him that shall overcome, I will give*

¹ JOHN 14³

² JOHN 16⁷

*to sit with me in my throne: as I also have overcome, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*¹

The sacrifice of Christ did not end with the tragedy of Calvary but is continued eternally in heaven where, according to St. Paul, our Savior *hath an everlasting priesthood, whereby he is able also to save for ever them that come to God by him; always living to make intercession for us.*²

Day after day we repeat our offenses against almighty God and we might well despair had we not in heaven a powerful advocate. *If any man sin, says the inspired word, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just: and he is the propitiation for our sins.*³ We are unable to pray as we ought or perhaps we neglect it somewhat; but Jesus is ceaselessly praying for us, and his efficacious prayer brings down upon us the abundance of God's grace. Our nature is weak, but our Lord sends his Holy Spirit to give us strength and courage. Does not so great love deserve our utmost confidence? On whom shall we rely as on our brother, the Lord Jesus?

¹ APOC. 3²¹

² HEB. 7²⁴⁻²⁵

³ JOHN 2¹⁻²

3. Jesus Christ in his sacramental life on the altar. The Eucharist is par excellence the sacrament of Christ's love for souls. Out of his simple and overpowering love for us he remains on the altar under the sacramental veil. At the word of the priest, he descends from heaven to renew again and again the great sacrifice of Calvary and to apply its infinite merits to us more efficaciously.

Jesus Christ instituted this most blessed sacrament to give his own body and blood as the spiritual food of men's souls, to unite them more intimately to himself. By means of this sacrament, our divine Master has found a way to share our exile in this world, to continually dwell among us. Jesus in the Eucharist is the most precious treasure of the Church, the radiant source of light and of love. The God of heaven and earth is here familiarly accessible to all, always ready to hear us, to receive our adoration, to grant our petitions. Should not this expression of God's love for man fill us with unhesitating confidence and trustfulness?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Jesus, how often I hear thy name every day and how often it is on my lips! There are in my daily life so many reminders of thy mercy and thy love, inviting me to place my confidence in thee, to rely upon thy grace, on thee to build the edifice of my perfection. *For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus.*¹

How well, dear Lord, thou mightest say to me as thou didst to the apostles on the eve of thy sacred passion: *Hitherto you have not asked anything in my name.*² Thou art the all-powerful mediator and the infinitely good intercessor by whose help I can obtain everything that I need; and yet at the same time thou art ready to be my best and most intimate friend. But how have I repaid so merciful a condescension? Have I sought in thee my consolation in trial, my strength in temptation, my courage in struggles? Have I been eager to visit thee every day in thy sanctuary?

I regret, Lord Jesus, that I have so greatly failed to abandon myself and all my interests

¹ COR. 3¹¹

² JOHN 16²⁴

to thy providence. Grant me the grace to practice absolute trust and confidence in thee, my God, my Savior, my Friend.

I resolve:

1. In temptation to rely more trustingly on Jesus Christ;
2. In all my prayers to abandon myself to Jesus Christ.

Per Christum, cum Christo, in Christo.

VI

LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN GOD

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the perfect confidence that Jesus Christ placed in his all-powerful Father, a persevering trust full of fervor and love. We will recall his firm confidence in God when the devil tempted him.
- II. We will consider three ways in which we may sin against Christian confidence.
 1. *By lukewarmness.* Confidence finds expression in prayer. The tepid soul, however, prays little or not at all. It does not earnestly desire to grow in perfection and hence does not feel the need of God's help.
 2. *By presumption.* The presumptuous soul makes an effort to grow in perfection, but failing to realize its own weakness, depends more upon self than upon God. We believe in the necessity of grace. But is this knowledge merely speculative or does it practically influence our daily life?
 3. *By discouragement.* Some lack the courage to undertake the difficult but important work of their sanctification. We may be discouraged because we do not appreciate the power of Christian prayer; because our petitions are not answered promptly; because we have relapsed into habits that we thought overcome.

III. If we are lukewarm or presumptuous or discouraged, we will ask God to drive from our soul these obstacles to absolute trust in him. We will pray for a firm and persevering trust in his providence.

We will resolve:

1. To try to realize more fully that we can do nothing in the way of sanctification without the help of God's grace;

2. Frequently to ask ourselves whether our confidence in God has been weakened by luke-warmness, by presumption, or by discouragement.

God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.

I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the perfect confidence that Jesus Christ placed in God, his Father, a confidence full of fervor and love, and productive of continual aspirations towards God. When the devil tempted him to perform a useless and ostentatious miracle, saying: *If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written: That he hath given his Angels charge over thee, and in their hands shall they bear thee*

up, lest perhaps thou dash thy foot against a stone;¹ our Savior in simple confidence replied: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.² Christ's confidence in his heavenly Father was always firm. Under the great sorrow that overwhelmed him during his agony in the garden, and at all times even to the end, he trusted wholly in God. Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.³

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Souls frequently sin against Christian confidence in three different ways: the lukewarm do not make the effort or take the trouble to ask of God the assistance needed that they may advance towards perfection; the presumptuous, in working out their salvation as well as in matters of lesser moment, depend upon God less confidently than upon their own efforts; the discouraged, deeming further growth in holiness beyond their power, consider it futile to seek God's assistance.

1. *We sin against Christian confidence by lukewarmness and negligence in the service of*

¹ MATTH. [4⁶]

² MATTH. 4⁷

³ LUKE 23⁴⁶

God. The tepid soul, though neither denying the power and need of grace nor the efficacy of prayer to obtain it, yet in reality and practice does not trust confidently in God.

Confidence finds its expression necessarily in prayer, the elevation of the soul to God, asking his help in our needs: the lukewarm soul, however, prays but little or not at all. At least it does not desire to grow in perfection and hence does not ask God for needed graces. Ever ready to unite his action with ours in the production of works of holiness, our Lord only awaits our request for assistance, a petition which the lukewarm soul fails to make.

What a deplorable lack of Christian confidence is revealed by such souls! Am I one of these? If my trust in God is so feeble, is it not because I have attached but little importance to my soul's sanctification and salvation? If I am not inclined to seek God's assistance against the temptations that assail me, is it not because I care little whether I successfully resist them or weakly yield to them? If my confidence in God is so weak that I neglect to implore his aid to overcome the sinful inclinations of my nature, is it not because I am

indifferent as to their being kept in check? Has the frequent repetition of prayers and the routine of spiritual exercises produced in me that tepidity which may destroy my confidence in God's providence?

2. *We sin against Christian confidence by presumption.* The presumptuous soul desires to grow in perfection and makes an effort to do so. It is endowed with a firm and generous will, capable of making great sacrifices and overcoming serious obstacles, but in this great work of its salvation, failing to realize its own weakness, the presumptuous soul relies more upon self than upon God.

Not because we are ignorant of the teaching of our faith that grace is necessary for any supernatural act do we presume on our own power, but because that knowledge is merely speculative, because we do not make this conviction exercise a practical influence on our daily life. We are not conscious of the action of grace in our soul when it is helping and sustaining us and imparting efficacy to our efforts; hence, we easily attribute the success of our efforts to ourselves.

Then, we readily persuade ourselves that to be virtuous depends solely upon our own

efforts; that to fulfill God's holy will it is necessary to use only the resources of our own activity; that we are able to overcome the sinful tendencies of our nature and to perform all the duties of our station in life with fidelity and generosity by the mere exercise of our own unaided powers.

We are thus presumptuous in spite of our repeated failures and relapses. Does not our actual practice of virtue fall lamentably short of our good resolutions? Is it not folly, therefore, to depend solely upon our own will power for the faithful adherence to our resolutions? By all means let us develop firmness of will; but, instructed by the teaching of Jesus Christ and our own repeated failures, we should not forget that, unless fortified with his grace, we are of ourselves weak indeed.

And when at the close of the day or at the end of a week we can say in all sincerity that we have done well, that we have overcome temptation, that we have advanced in virtue, let us thank God, the real source of our success, and with St. Paul let us repeat: *By the grace of God, I am what I am.*¹

¹ COR. 15¹⁰

3. *We sin against Christian confidence by discouragement.* Some of us are easily discouraged. Holiness and perfection we highly esteem and desire, yet, owing to the exaggerated sense of our own weakness, we lack the courage to undertake the work of our sanctification.

Various causes tend to produce this disorder in our souls.

Perhaps we do not appreciate the power and efficacy of Christian prayer. Do we realize in a practical way that a simple desire of our heart can mount to the throne of the Almighty, move his holy will, and bring down an abundance of divine grace? When we do not practically believe this, are we not wanting in Christian confidence? We pray, but it may be without that firm hope of being heard which is essential to the efficacy of prayer.

Perhaps we are discouraged because the grace for which we have petitioned does not come promptly. And have we, feeling that our prayer is useless, failed to persevere therein?

Sometimes it happens that discouragement comes from a relapse into habits that we thought were overcome. At a moment when

divine grace appealed to us with special power, we made a generous effort to break with our capricious, selfish life, that we might give ourselves unreservedly to God. Afterwards, due to the lack of watchfulness and self-examination or perhaps to sudden temptation, we fell again. Witnessing the ill success frequently attendant upon our efforts, we have not always courage enough to try again.

Should this state of discouragement become deep-seated, nothing is more surely fatal to our salvation. All the helps within our reach are useless, for we will not avail ourselves of them. Our energy, our lofty aspirations, our strength of will are gone. Thus it is that for many discouragement has been the source of the most grievous faults.

It behooves us to ask ourselves whether discouragement, either on account of the difficulty in acquiring virtue or on account of previous failures, does not truly account for having made so little progress in the spiritual life. Seeing that we have made so many retreats that produced in us no perceptible results, it may have seemed that God is deaf to our most earnest prayers. And then we may have ceased to make any further efforts,

ceased to renew our resolutions, ceased to pray.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Thou alone, my God, canst drive from my soul the obstacles that interfere with my absolute trust in thee. Help me with thy grace.

If I am lukewarm and indifferent in the all-important matter of my salvation and sanctification, inspire me with zeal for holiness that I may fervently and confidently seek the powerful help of thy grace.

If I am presumptuous, allow me to fully realize my own weakness, my inability to accomplish any good without thy assistance.

If I am discouraged, grant me that confidence and generous fervor which made St. Paul exclaim: *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*¹

Whatever may be the defects and failures of my weak nature, never let me lose my confidence in thee, my God and my all, but rather develop and strengthen it. In all my undertakings, grant that I should put my trust in thee.

¹ PHILIP. 4¹³

I resolve:

1. To try to realize more fully that I can do nothing in the way of my sanctification without the help of God's grace;
2. Frequently to ask myself whether my confidence in God has been weakened by luke-warmness, by presumption, or by discouragement.

God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.¹

I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.²

¹ I COR. 10¹³

² PHILIP. 4¹³

VII

MOTIVES FOR LOVING GOD

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God who created us to love him. The love of God should be our first duty here on earth. We will repeat with the psalmist: *What have I in heaven? And besides thee what do I desire upon earth?*
- II. To better appreciate our obligation of loving God, we will consider: what he is in himself; what he has done for us; what he promises to those who love him.

1. *What God is in himself.* He is perfect goodness, beauty, and wisdom. Every attraction in creatures is but a reflection of his divine perfection. The marvelous laws of nature as also the admirable virtue of the saints are but a feeble reflection of God's infinite wisdom and goodness.

2. *What God has done for us.* We are naturally grateful to those who are kind and generous to us. But how insignificant all other benefactors appear when compared with God. His fatherly providence has guarded and directed our whole life. Health, friendships, talents, vocation, all are the gifts of his bounty, which reached its climax in the incarnation and the sacrifice of the cross.

3. What God promises to those who love him.

In return for our love, he will satisfy our longing search for happiness by securing us in the eternal possession of himself. *Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.*

III. We will endeavor to appreciate our obligation of loving God. And we will ask him for the grace to grow constantly in his love.

We will resolve:

1. To acquire the habit of performing all our important acts out of love for God;
2. To ask frequently that our love for him may constantly increase and grow more pure.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . This is the first commandment.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God who, as it were, not satisfied with enjoying his own blessedness himself, has brought out of nothingness creatures with whom to share his love. In heaven the continual joy of the angels consists in loving God; and this same bliss God wills to be ours for eternity. It is for this end that our Creator endowed us with a rational soul. The love of God should be our first and, we may say, our only duty here on earth as in the next life it is to be the principle of our everlasting

blessedness. *What am I*, said St. Augustine, *that thou shouldst command me to love thee?*¹ Is it not a great honor that my God should become my blessedness, the end to which my will should be directed?

Would that every creature might praise and glorify thee, might love thee now on earth as thou art loved eternally in heaven. Would that I might repeat in the spirit of the psalmist: *What have I in heaven? and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? . . . Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever.*²

II. CONSIDERATIONS

We shall better appreciate our obligation of loving God if we consider: what he is in himself; what he has done for us; what he promises to those who love him.

1. *What God is in himself.* God is a being infinitely perfect, possessing all conceivable perfections in their highest degree. Not only is he supremely good and beautiful and wise; he is goodness, beauty, and wisdom itself. If

¹ *Confessions*, bk. 2.

² Ps. 72²⁵⁻²⁶

any created being whatsoever appears attractive to me, if any seems worthy of love, it is because I perceive in it some reflection of the divine perfections.

Do the beauties of the heavens and the earth, the myriads of stars that stud the sky, the forests and fields in spring ever afford me pleasure? Have the masterpieces of music or painting a special attraction for me? Yet God is infinitely more beautiful.

I have studied the natural sciences, have admired the wonderful laws that with such perfect harmony govern this material universe. I contemplate the heavenly bodies revolving for countless ages; the more I learn of the laws which govern the universe, the more my wonder increases. Yet all this is, as it were, but a slight acquaintance with a feeble reflection of God's infinite wisdom. The wisdom of God surpasseth all understanding.

Am I not irresistibly attracted by whatever is good? When I admire the saints or certain priests and people of the world, is it not because of the good that I see in them? Does not my very nature force me to seek out and approve what is noble and truly good? But God alone is infinitely good.

If I love and admire these wonderful works of God's hand, shall I fail to love the Almighty himself, in whom every perfection is to be found infinitely? And shall I limit or qualify my love for him or will that love be ever growing, ever increasing, ever becoming more and more purified? May I love God to-day more than I did yesterday, and to-morrow more than to-day!

2. *What God has done for us.* It is a law of our nature to be grateful to our benefactors. There is no defect of character more odious, none that more readily arouses our contempt and indignation, than ingratitude. We love our parents to whom we owe our life, our home, our education; we love the friends who have been kind to us and interested in us, who aid and encourage us in the hour of need; in short, we love those who have given us testimony and proof of their love for us.

But how insignificant all these benefactors appear when compared with God! Did he not create me and likewise the earth upon which he has placed me? With fatherly care and concern, his divine providence watches over me, guarding and directing my whole life. Even a cursory glance over my past

life will assure me of his guiding influence. My health, my friendships, my talents, my advantages over those less favored, my successes and progress, the grace of a vocation to his priesthood, all these favors, far in excess of anything I could deserve, are the gifts of his bounty. Even my neglect of his grace and my other sins seem not to make him withdraw his mercies.

How often he has pardoned my offenses and reinstated me in his friendship! Is it not astonishing that God should so love the souls of men? Did not his love reach the climax when he became incarnate, living among us, teaching us and suffering for us, and crowning his life on earth by the sacrifice of the cross? Besides all this, in instituting the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist and establishing a priesthood to perpetuate this miracle of his love, he devised a means of remaining forever with us. How frequently are we the recipients of his grace, that mysterious force which, though unseen, strengthens our weakness, assuages our pains, helps us overcome the temptations that beset us, and perfects us in the practice of Christian virtues?

God is infinitely more deserving of our love than any other of our benefactors. Indeed all others are but the providential instruments of his love. Then let us acknowledge our debt of gratitude. What God asks is love.

3. *What God promises to those who love him.* No doubt I should love God because he is good and worthy of my love. But in his gracious mercy he has been willing to encourage my weakness by promising incomparable advantages in return for my love. Thus my duty to God is identical with my own best interests.

Among all the instincts inherent in our nature, none is more assertive and insistent, none more fundamental and universal than the desire for happiness. At once a powerful, stimulating motive of action and yet the most insatiable aspiration of our human nature.

We seem altogether unable to satisfy this capacity for happiness. When we contemplate some longed for possession yet beyond our reach, it may seem to us that the object of our desire has the power to make us happy and contented; but how often have we not been disappointed in experiencing that its attractiveness ceased with possession? When

we were children, what brought us happiness one day was discarded the next. And is it not now as impossible for us to be permanently happy and contented as it was then?

I never will be perfectly happy, O my God, until I am secure in the eternal possession of thee, my only blessedness and supreme good. Most truly has St. Augustine said: *Thou hast formed us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee.*¹

Even here on earth I will derive much contentment and peace of mind by seeking thee, my God. The love of thee will render me better able to resist temptation, better able to bear with temporal losses and failures.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, by the help of thy grace I understand the obligation of loving thee. I understand and firmly believe that loving thee is the only way to acquire true peace of heart and mind on earth and eternal blessedness in heaven. But I need thy grace to help me practice this my first and foremost duty.

¹ *Confessions*, bk. I, ch. 1.

Grant me the grace to grow constantly in the love of thee. With thy assistance I will break off all undue attachments, whether to evil habits or occasions of sin. May I love thee in all things and more than all things. *O God, who hast prepared for those who love thee good things beyond the vision of man, pour into our hearts such love towards thee that we, loving thee in all things and above all things, may attain thy promises which exceed all that we can desire.*¹

I resolve:

1. To acquire the habit of performing all my important acts out of love for God;
2. To ask God frequently that my love for him may constantly increase and grow more pure.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. . . . This is the greatest and the first commandment.*²

¹ Collect for the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

² MATTH. 22³⁷

VIII

EXCELLENCE OF THE LOVE OF GOD

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Holy Spirit and thank him for assuring us that the love of God is the most excellent of all virtues. *This is the greatest and the first commandment.* It surpasses all other commandments by the grandeur and dignity of its object, by the gravity of the obligation to observe it, and by the greater number of precepts that follow therefrom.

II. The love of God, which we call charity, surpasses all other virtues: by its very nature and by its effects.

1. *The nature of charity.* It is the most perfect of the theological virtues. *There remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.* Charity embraces God's infinite perfection, his entire being. It will not cease with death. Unlike other virtues, it is truly the end of all our activity.

2. *The effects of charity.* It effaces the guilt of sin from our souls. We will reflect upon the scene and circumstances in which Christ forgave the sins of the sinner because of her charity. *Many sins are forgiven her, he said, because she hath loved much.* Charity also strengthens our

soul to suffer privation and sacrifice. *Charity is patient . . . beareth all things . . . endureth all things.*

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have earnestly desired this pearl of great price and whether we dread whatever may lessen or destroy it in our souls. And, finally, we will implore God's grace to help us cherish this virtue of charity and accept little inconveniences and hardships out of love for God.

We will resolve:

1. To endeavor this very day frequently to make acts of perfect charity;
2. To try seriously to acquire the habit of performing every act and enduring every trial out of love for God.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart . . . This is the greatest and the first commandment.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Holy Spirit and thank him for making known to us in Holy Writ the perfection and excellence of the love of God. The precept obliging us to love God is proclaimed along with the love of our neighbor, the great Christian duty in which are summed up all the commandments of God. *On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets. Thou shalt love the Lord*

thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. And our Savior adds: *This is the greatest and the first commandment.*¹ Here we have the noblest, the most elevated, the most essential commandment of God, embracing, as our divine Master tells us, all the others and surpassing them by the grandeur and dignity of its object, by the gravity of the obligation to observe it, and by the great number of precepts that follow therefrom. It is, in a way, all that God asks of us.

The holy doctors and saints of God teach us the same truth. Says St. Augustine: *Other gifts amount to naught without charity. But with charity everything is worthy.*²

This virtue is truly the foundation of the Christian life. On earth we can find nothing more grand and noble, nothing more excellent, and nothing more worthy of a Christian. And *in heaven*, says one of God's saints, *all virtue will be to love what one sees, and the highest felicity to have what one loves.*

Let us thank Jesus Christ for having taught the love of God so insistently throughout his

¹ MATTH. 22³⁷⁻⁴⁰

² Sermon 50 *De verbo domini.*

earthly life that the New Covenant of his gospel is fittingly called the law of love.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The love of God, which we call charity, surpasses all other virtues notably in these two ways: by its very nature and by its effects.

1. *The nature of charity.* Among the various Christian virtues we must recognize degrees of excellence. Naturally the most worthy are those which have God for their immediate object. They are the theological virtues: faith, by which we believe in him; hope, by which we expect him and long for him; charity, by which we love him.

The great apostle St. Paul teaches us that of these three eminent virtues charity is the most perfect. *There remain faith, hope, and charity these three: but the greatest of these is charity.*¹

Faith and hope are concerned, so to speak, with only a portion of God's attributes, namely, his veracity and his fidelity to his promises. Charity, however, embraces his

² I COR. 13

infinite perfection, his entire being, and is not restricted to some one particular attribute.

Faith and hope are, by their very nature, only temporary means and not desirable for their own sake. As they are virtues adapted to the conditions of our earthly exile, they will disappear when we reach our true fatherland. Then the soul will no longer believe, but will see; it will no longer hope, but will have attained its blessedness. Charity, however, takes its rise in this life, and instead of ceasing at the moment of death, will only then experience its complete and eternal development. What is heaven if not charity carried to its perfect consummation?

Again, other virtues are means to some ulterior end; but the love of God is an end to be desired for itself. In fact it is the end of all our activity, even of divine grace itself. In the ultimate analysis, was not the purpose of Christ's incarnation to remind men of their obligation to love his heavenly Father, to show us the way and provide ampler means? For what greater purpose did God call us to the priesthood than to arouse in men, by every means in our power, a greater love for him? Should we not, therefore, esteem charity above every other virtue?

2. *The effects of charity.* The first great effect of the love of God is to efface the guilt that stains our souls. Let us imagine a man whose life has been a series of grievous sins. If, by the grace of God, he heartily makes an act of perfect charity, at once he is justified, restored to the friendship of his Maker and Savior, and his soul is again beautiful and pleasing in the eyes of God.

Let us reflect upon a scene from our Lord's life wherein love accomplishes this miracle of purification. Jesus was dining in the house of Simon the Pharisee when a notorious sinful woman came in. *She brought an alabaster box of ointment; and standing behind at his feet, she began to wash his feet with tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.* But the Pharisee thought to himself: *This man, if he were a prophet, would surely know who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner.*¹ And Jesus knew well that she had been a great sinner. But he also knew, which the Pharisee did not, the transforming power of charity, that it could turn a sinner into a saint. *Many sins are*

¹ LUKE 7³⁷⁻³⁹

*forgiven her, he said, because she hath loved much.*¹

Another effect of love is the giving into our hands of a divine power. Nothing equals the power of love. Says the author of the Imitation: *It doth perform and effect many things, where he that loveth not fainteth and falleth prostrate.* And again: *Love feeleth no burden, thinketh nothing of labors, would willingly do more than it can, complaineth not of impossibility, because it conceiveth that it may and can do all things.*²

The soul that truly loves God needs neither commands nor prohibitions, neither promises nor threats, neither rewards nor penalties. The all-powerful law of love takes the place of all these. Must the soul suffer privation and sacrifice? Charity will give it courage. Must it undergo humiliation, failure, reverses? Charity will patiently support all. *Charity is patient,* says St. Paul, . . . *beareth all things . . . endureth all things.*³ Charity generously devotes itself to labors, to poverty and suffering, inspires us with even heroic fidelity in the accomplishment of our duties.

¹ LUKE 7⁴⁷

² IMIT. III, 5⁴

³ I COR. 13^{4,7}

Let us consider the effect of charity when it becomes our actuating motive, especially in the performance of those countless little acts of our daily life, otherwise insignificant and unimportant. These, when done for the love of God, become so many meritorious works. Whilst the most sublime deeds accomplished by a soul deprived of charity would be destitute of supernatural merit.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Have I fully realized, my God, that the love of thee is truly the first and greatest of all virtues? And have I earnestly desired it above all things, understanding that I ought willingly to part with everything else that I call mine in order to obtain this pearl of great price? Do I dread sin that would destroy my love for thee?

Can I answer these questions sincerely, dear Lord, without realizing how weak I am, how much I am in need of thy grace? Thou alone, my Jesus, canst make me appreciate the true worth of charity, thou alone canst inspire me with an ardent desire for this treasure, thou alone canst confer this gift, canst preserve and

develop it in my heart. Grant, then, that I may adopt this as a rule of my life, the motive of my acts, great or small. May I willingly accept little inconveniences and hardships out of love for thee?

I resolve:

1. To endeavor this very day frequently to make acts of perfect charity;
2. To try seriously to acquire the habit of performing every act and enduring every trial out of love for God.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart. . . . This is the greatest and the first commandment.¹

¹ MATTH. 22:37-38

IX

DEGREES IN THE LOVE OF GOD

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God making known to us the measure with which we should love him. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength.* Jesus Christ, our model in all virtues, loved his heavenly Father without measure.
- II. We will consider three principal degrees in the practice of divine charity.

1. *To love God above all things.* This is to have such a preference for God that, rather than lose his grace and friendship, we are disposed to sacrifice all, even life itself if need be. We may fail in this by loving what God forbids and by undue attachment to created things.

2. *To love God in all things.* We should refer everything to the love of God. We must bear in mind that whatever power creatures have to please and attract is a participation in God's sovereign goodness, and that he thus communicates his beauty and goodness to us to help us perform our duties more readily. So we should love creatures for God, who gave them to us.

3. *To love God alone.* This degree of charity is difficult and holy. It entails the exercise of full and unreserved power of soul. Our whole life is inspired by holy charity, which thereby becomes our only rule and law.

III. As Christians, called to God's holy priesthood, we have engaged to enkindle in the hearts of others the fire of divine love. We will ask ourselves whether we have yet learned to love God as generously as becomes the eminence of our vocation. We will pray for the grace to grow in God's love daily.

We will resolve:

1. To renounce all undue attachment to things of earth;
2. To accustom ourselves to seek God in all things and to seek all things for his sake alone;
3. Every day to ask of God the grace to love him more and more.

My God, make me one with thee in everlasting charity.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God commanding us to love him and at the same time making known to us the measure in which we should practice this virtue. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength.*¹

¹ MARK 12³⁰

This accumulation of terms, employed to formulate the great law of charity, shows us with emphatic clearness that, in the love which God requires of us, there should be no limit, that in this virtue we need fear no excess; as St. Bernard says: *The only measure by which to love God is to love him without measure.* Let us gratefully thank God for this teaching and let us acknowledge the truth of it. Is it not just that in loving God we should employ the full power of our soul?

Our divine Master, the model of perfection in all virtues, is our example in the love of God. He loved his heavenly Father with his whole mind. Divine charity was the express motive of his every act. Let us often reflect upon this constant disposition of our Lord's soul. And let us ask for the grace to imitate it.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

We may distinguish three principal degrees in the practice of divine charity: to love God above all things; to love God in all things; to love God alone.

1. *To love God above all things.* To love God in this manner is to have for him such

a preference that, rather than lose his grace and friendship, we are disposed to sacrifice all, even life itself, if need be.

Such was the interior disposition of the heart of the great apostle when he said: *Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation? or distress? or famine? or nakedness? or danger? or persecution? or the sword? . . . But in all these things we overcome, because of him that has loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*¹

To love any created object, either more or even as much as we love God renders it his superior or equal in our esteem, and shows that we do not properly value the infinite perfections of God, the supreme Lord of all creation. God, the infinitely perfect being deserves the first place in our affections.

In various ways we may fail to render to God the love that he deserves. In the first

¹ ROM. 8²⁸⁻³⁹

place we may love what God forbids. So it is that the sinner in choosing wrong prefers the creature to the Creator. Inasmuch as he desires and loves anything contrary to God's holy will, he fails to prefer God; and if the virtue of charity is not entirely destroyed in him, it is at least altered and weakened.

Then, too, we violate divine charity when we become so attached to what God permits us to love that we are not disposed to sacrifice it when he so requires. Our most legitimate affections thereby result in an unjust preference of creatures to the Creator. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, Christ said, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.*¹

2. *To love God in all things.* If we love God more than any created good, we have complied with the essential obligation of the precept of charity. But the perfection of this virtue requires more. Since God alone is our last end, we ought to consider and use all else as means to that blessed end. Whence it follows that not only should we subordinate everything but we should refer everything to

¹ MATTH. 10³⁷

the love of God. This divine charity should direct, govern and sanctify every other love. In this sense we ought to love God in all things, that is we should love all things for God.

That we may love God in his creatures that appear pleasing to us, we should bear in mind two truths: first, that their power to please and attract is a participation in God's sovereign goodness and hence whatever is attractive in them comes from him; secondly, that, when he wills to communicate his beauty and goodness to us by means of his creatures, it is in order to help us perform our duties more readily and thus assist us to our last end. Now, if we remember this twofold truth, we will love creatures, not for themselves, but for God, who gave them to us; or rather, realizing that they possess no attraction except what comes from God, we will truly love God in them.

And let us also valiantly love God in the sorrows and trials that befall us through his creatures. For he who is the principle and source of our joys is the same God who gives us the opportunity to prove our devotion in tribulation. In all that he does or permits, he is worthy of our highest love.

3. *To love God alone.* This is indeed difficult and holy but it should be our highest aim. To love created things only in relation to God and for his sake ought to be a stepping-stone to the perfection of this virtue, the love of God alone. This lofty degree of charity entails the exercise of full and unreserved power of soul. In this state every action of our life is inspired by holy charity, which thereby becomes our only rule and law. We are then indifferent to the attractions of earth, proof against its temptations, masters of our own passions, conquerors of our sinful tendencies. *For what have I in heaven may we say with the psalmist, and besides thee what do I desire upon earth? . . . Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion forever.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, I profess to belong to a society of souls that love thee; I call myself a Christian. More than this: in accepting thy call to the holy priesthood, I have undertaken and agreed to use all my powers, my entire life in making known to men how infinitely worthy of love

¹ Ps. 72²⁵⁻²⁶

thou art; I have engaged to enkindle in their hearts the fire of thy holy love. Is it not, then, to be presumed that I myself have learned to love thee? But, for a fact, do I practice this virtue of charity as generously as becomes the eminence of my vocation and the abundance of light and grace accorded me?

O my God, how indulgent I am to my habits and to the creatures that surround me! How few are the acts of my life in which divine love has a share! How seldom from morning to night, from week to week, do I refer my acts to thee, how seldom do I offer up my duties out of love for thee!

Can I even say that I practice the lowest degree of charity, the love of thee above all things? Though I be living in the state of grace, yet how often do I not prefer my own satisfaction, my self-love, my ease and convenience, to thy manifest will!

Come, Holy Ghost, fill the hearts of thy faithful, and kindle in them the fire of thy love.¹ Divine Master and Savior, by thy all-powerful grace, centre my affections upon thee, my God and my all. Grant that I may daily grow in charity.

¹ *Office of Pentecost*

I resolve:

1. To renounce all undue attachment to things of earth;
2. To accustom myself to seek God in all things and to seek all things for his sake alone;
3. Every day to ask of God the grace to love him more and more.

My God, make me one with thee in everlasting charity.¹

¹ IMIT. I, 3²

X

PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord Jesus Christ teaching us by word and example to practice the love of God. *God is a spirit*, he says, *and they that adore him, must adore him in spirit and in truth*. Our love for God must be practically manifested in our works. The whole life of our Savior shows us how to practice divine Charity.

II. In the practical exercise of the love of God, we find three principal forms which correspond to the different obligations that it imposes upon us: affection, resignation, obedience.

1. *Affection.* The thought of God should be always pleasing and familiar and welcome to us. Love of complacency makes exercises of piety a source of delight and consolation. It makes us rejoice when God is honored and inspires us with apostolic zeal for the spread of his kingdom.

2. *Resignation.* If we love God, we must love what he loves and approve whatever pleases his divine providence. So we will accept without complaint whatever comes from his hands.

3. *Obedience.* Love should make us obey all the laws and commands of God. We may not be conscious of any emotional affection for God.

But if our will is disposed to please him in all things, we have charity.

III. Are we not lukewarm and even greatly distracted during prayer and at other exercises of piety? Do we submit joyfully to all the acts of God's providence? Do we seek to please him by obeying his precepts and following his counsels in great matters and in small? We will ask God to kindle in us the fire of his love.

We will resolve:

1. To try to cultivate the habit of recollection, often thinking of God and conversing with him;
2. Out of love for God to accept without complaint whatever crosses his providence may send us;
3. To strive to conform to God's holy will in all things, great and small, precepts and counsels.

Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

If you love me, keep my commandments.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus Christ teaching us by word and example to practice the love of God. *God is a spirit*, says our Savior, *and they that adore him, must adore him in spirit and in truth.*¹ It is necessary to love

¹ JOHN 4²⁴

God in spirit, that is, not only by words and external acts, not principally by such outward signs, but by interior acts. We must love him in truth; our love for God must be practical, a love which manifests itself in our works, in real sacrifices that cost us an effort. If we would be pleasing in the sight of God and worthy of admission to the blessedness of heaven, it will not suffice that we utter fervent ejaculations and holy aspirations; we must obey the laws imposed by God's holy will. Says our divine Savior: *Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.*¹

Our blessed Savior himself carried out this teaching during his entire life on earth. For he fulfilled in every detail the will of his Father so that not only could he say: *As the Father hath given me commandment, so do I;*² but he could truly testify that he adhered to every desire of his heavenly Father: *For I do always the things that please him.*³ To this law of

¹ MATTH. 7²¹

² JOHN 14³¹

³ JOHN 8²⁹

charity all his acts, all his utterances, all his thoughts and desires conformed; and when the bitter chalice of his passion was offered him, he did not turn away. Willingly did he bear the cross and suffer a cruel death thereon.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

In the practical exercise of the love of God, we find three principal forms which correspond to the different obligations that it imposes upon us: affection, resignation, obedience.

1. *Affection.* Love of complacency causes us to take pleasure in the thought of the one loved and makes us wish that we might be always in his presence. We enjoy seeing him, talking to him, listening to his words; we are deeply interested in everything that concerns him, sharing alike his joys and his sorrows.

Such likewise are the effects of divine charity upon a soul that truly loves God. The thought of him is always pleasing and familiar and welcome. In the midst of the distractions and preoccupations of a busy world, the thought of God is brought back and kept in mind by the constant and persevering love of him.

For a soul that possesses this love of complacency, exercises of piety are a source of delight and consolation. For are they not, as it were, interviews with the object of his love? Such a soul is fond of prayer, communion, spiritual reading, visits to the blessed sacrament. For these are so many means of more intimate union with the one whom he loves above all the world. His happiest moments are those spent in converse with his Lord. There he forgets the world and its vanities, and alone with God enjoys a peace and contentment which the world can not bestow. The minutes thus consecrated to God pass all too quickly.

At the thought of deep and wide-spread sin by which God's majesty is despised and his generous providence outraged, the soul that truly loves him is saddened; and in the intensity and firmness of its affection, it is ready to make any sacrifice required of it by God.

For the same reason it rejoices when God is honored and, in the ardent desire to see him praised and loved, it becomes a zealous apostle to spread his kingdom in the souls of men.

2. Resignation. A soul that is attached to God by the love of complacency loves all that he loves, wills all that is pleasing to him. Ever ready and willing to submit to his holy will, it accepts without complaint, even joyfully, whatever comes from his hands. Here we find a new exercise of divine love, a new form of charity which especially deserves our attention since it leads to a great number of practical applications.

Almighty God manifests himself to us by all the events of our life, which are ordained or permitted by his adorable providence for the good of our immortal souls. Wherefore a soul that has a genuine love for God generously accepts all the trials and sufferings that God permits.

This is truly the only way to acquire peace of mind on earth. The happiest men are those resigned to God's holy will. For whatever befalls them, whatever failures attend their best efforts, they accept all as coming from the hand of divine providence. Neither honors nor riches nor success arouse vanity or undue ambition in their hearts; while reverses, suffering, and misfortune fail to provoke a murmur of discontent. The love of God has

so broadened their horizon that they view with indifference these accidental conditions of their life on earth. Only one thing they abhor and shun: sin, that opposes the great law of love.. The result of this practice of charity is the union of our wills to the divine will of God so that we might, in a way, say with St. Paul: *I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.*¹

3. *Obedience.* Love should make us obey all the laws and commands by which God directs the moral conduct of his creatures. His holy will thus expressed should be the rule of our life.

We know well that to fail in obedience to the divine will when manifested to us, that is, to do anything that it forbids or to omit what it prescribes, is to incur perhaps the eternal loss of our immortal soul. But we should honor the commands of God from a nobler motive, the motive of love. *He that keepeth his word, says the Gospel, in him in very deed the charity of God is perfected; and by this we know that we are in him. . . . For this is the charity of God, that we keep his commandments.*²

¹ GAL. 2²⁰

² JOHN 14²¹

Perhaps at times I do not feel that affectionate regard which we suppose ought to accompany the exercise of divine love. In times of trials I may not always be conscious of a loving submission to Providence. Nevertheless, if I find that I am really faithful to God and his interests, if I am confident that my will is disposed to please God in all things, let me not doubt my love for him. When I am seeking to please God, let me often recall these words of Christ to his first disciples: *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them; he it is that loveth me.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Every day, my God, and many times a day I profess to love thee. Nor are my words devoid of sincerity. And yet thou mayest well ask for real and practical proof of my love. Do not the thoughts of the soul that loves thee turn spontaneously to the object of that love? Am I thus disposed, or am I lukewarm and even greatly distracted during prayer and at other exercises of piety?

Charity inclines a soul to accept everything as coming from thy hand, to submit joyfully

¹ I JOHN 2¹; 5²

to all the acts of thy providence. But how do I receive the little crosses that I must bear, failures, misunderstandings, humiliations, and hardships of one sort or another?

Do I prove my love for thee by seeking to please thee in every act, by faithful obedience to thy law, and the practice of the counsels that lead to Christian perfection? Do I even hate and avoid sin?

Thou alone, my God, by thy grace canst kindle in me the fire of thy love, that true and effective charity which is manifested in works, that strong charity which no obstacle can hinder and which prompts the Christian soul to make any sacrifice for thee. Would that I might love thee, my Jesus, as thou didst love thy apostles, the martyrs, all holy and zealous priests, as thou dost love me, most unworthy though I am. Would that I might love thee to the full extent of my power, with my whole mind, with my whole soul, with my whole strength.

I resolve:

1. To try to cultivate the habit of recollection, often thinking of God and conversing with him;

2. Out of love for God to accept without complaint whatever crosses his providence may send me;

3. To strive to conform to God's holy will in all things, great and small, precepts and counsels.

Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.¹

If you love me, keep my commandments.²

¹ JOHN 3:18

² JOHN 14:15

XI

MOTIVES FOR THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOR

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Holy Spirit, model and principle of our love for one another. Christ himself prayed: *that they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee.* We will contemplate the marvelous exhibition of fraternal charity which the first Christians gave to the world.

II. The better to appreciate our obligation of loving one another, we will reflect that fraternal charity is a most Christian and most reasonable virtue.

1. *A most Christian virtue.* *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart. . . . Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets. Our blessed Savior calls this precept his own commandment.

2. *A most reasonable virtue.* In the merely natural order men form, as it were, a family with God for our Father. In the attainment of our last end we have to live, not isolated, but in a complex society, founded on mutual dependence of reciprocal needs. We Christians, moreover, and especially we ministers of the sacrament of Christ's love, should have a greater love for the members of his mystical body.

III. In vain will be all other virtues, our summary training, our priestly office if we practice not the virtue of charity. But we can not love God without loving our neighbor. We will regret that our fraternal charity has been more narrow and selfish than Christ would wish.

We will resolve therefore:

1. To put into practice the maxim bequeathed by Jesus Christ: *As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner;*
2. Willingly to perform fraternal kindnesses that cost us some effort and sacrifice.

To love one's neighbor as himself is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Holy Spirit, model and principle of the love which should unite us mortals one to another. In him we honor the sacred bond that unites the three persons of the adorable Trinity and the image of the love which ought to unite all Christians here on earth. Our divine Savior prayed for the realization of this union among men, saying: *That they all may be one, as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us.¹*

¹ JOHN 17²¹

In the pagan world and even among God's chosen people there was little fraternal charity before the advent of Jesus Christ. But under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God in the primitive Church even at its birth, the first Christians gave to the world a marvelous spectacle, an exhibition of charity previously unknown. "See how the Christians love one another," the admiring but unfriendly observers were forced to acknowledge. So striking was the practice of fraternal charity among the first Christians that it served to distinguish them from other men.

The Holy Spirit, guiding and directing the Church, has so developed this unique Christian virtue that at the present day charity and charitable institutions instead of exciting wonder and concern are deemed a natural heritage.

To thee, Holy Spirit, source of this marvelous change, we offer our sincere gratitude. And we pray thee to develop and perfect among us that holy union of wills and hearts which arouses our admiration when we contemplate its zealous exercise in the early Church.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

That we may better appreciate our obligation of loving one another, let us reflect that fraternal charity is a most Christian and most reasonable virtue.

1. *A most Christian virtue.* To the question: *Which is the great commandment?*¹ our divine Master, Jesus Christ gives this express answer: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. And the second is like to this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.*² *There is no other commandment greater than these.*³

No doubt the whole pagan and Jewish world was formerly and is now bound to practice charity as a natural virtue. But upon us Christians, upon us the intimate and chosen friends of Jesus Christ, this virtue is especially binding because of our Lord's example and his emphatic-reiterated teaching that charity

¹ MATTH. 22³⁶

² MATTH. 22³⁷⁻⁴⁰

³ MARK 12³¹

is to be the great Christian perfection. *A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another as I have loved you.*¹ *This is my commandment,*² he says. So conspicuous and constant did he wish this new principle to become in the lives of his followers that it would be their distinguishing mark. *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.*³

How did the apostles themselves understand and carry out this principle of their divine Master? As we read the Acts of the Apostles we are surprised to learn to what extent fraternal charity was practiced in the apostolic Church during its life-struggle against the earliest persecutors. The apostles were untiring in their zeal for souls, transmitting by their teaching and example the divine precept of fraternal charity.

The first epistle of St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, is almost entirely devoted to the recommendation of charity. *He that loveth his brother abideth in the light. . . . But he that hateth his brother, is in darkness, and*

¹ JOHN 13³⁴

² JOHN 15¹²

³ JOHN 13³⁵

*walketh in darkness.*¹ Again in the same epistle he says: *If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother, whom he seeth, how can he love God, whom he seeth not?*²

The same teaching permeates the writings of St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. James that have come down to us. They proclaim fraternal charity as one of the fundamental articles of Christian morality, as an indispensable duty. *For he that loveth his neighbor,* says the great apostle, *hath fulfilled the law.*³

2. *Fraternal charity is most reasonable.* In the merely natural order all men form, as it were, a family with God for our Father. We are all placed in this world for the same purpose, the glory of God and our soul's salvation, and in its attainment we have to live, not isolated, but in a complex society, founded upon mutual dependence of reciprocal needs which can best be satisfied when we give aid and protection to one another. And must we not recognize that, in thus creating such a necessary interdependence, God has willed that we love one another?

¹ JOHN 2¹⁰⁻¹¹

² I JOHN 4²⁰⁻²¹

³ ROM. 13⁸

But we Christians have a nobler, more perfect bond of union in the community of grace. We are thus related, not as members of the same family, but more intimately as members of the same body, whose head is Jesus Christ. *We being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.*¹ We who are regenerated by holy Baptism, participate in the same life which, emanating from Christ the head, circulates through every part of his mystical body. United in this way to Jesus Christ and called to share his eternal inheritance, we are elevated to the dignity of children of God, and thus united one to another in a most intimate fraternal bond.

Now, in this mystical body Christ's priests, his representatives on earth, are and should be more intimately associated with him. Should we not, therefore, find here a true spirit of charity, a spirit of kindness, of generosity, and of magnanimity among those who are all ministers of the sacrament of Christ's love?

¹ ROM. 12⁵

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

In vain will I practice all other virtues, in vain will I undergo severe penances, in vain will I pass year after year in the seminary or in the ministry, if I have not charity. Now charity consists not only in loving God but also in loving our neighbor; or rather these are not two kinds of charity but one and the same; unless we love God we cannot love our neighbor; nor can we truly love God if we love not our neighbor.

Has this truth had a practical influence over my daily life? Every day I protest to God that I love him with my whole heart. But in practice do I not contradict this by failing in fraternal charity? Does my conduct towards those with whom I live and whom I meet more or less intimately bear the marks of true charity?

Charity is patient, says St. Paul. Do I, remembering my own defects, bear with the faults of others in a Christ-like spirit?

Charity . . . is kind. But am I always ready to oblige others and to do them a kindly office when I can and should? Am I amiable, sympathetic, tolerant, kind to all without exception? Or do I reserve the privilege of

treating some with unchristian coldness and civil indifference?

Charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; . . . is not ambitious, seeketh not her own. Charity that seeketh its own pleasure in doing good is not charity. But have I not some reason to reproach myself for selfishness in what I am pleased to call charity? Do I choose to associate only with those whose company I find most congenial? Am I ready to sacrifice my own comfort and convenience, my pleasures however legitimate, for another's advantage?

Let us constantly bear in mind our blessed Lord's own commandment: *that you love one another as I have loved you.*¹

I resolve therefore:

1. To put into practice the maxim bequeathed by Jesus Christ: *As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner;*²

2. Willingly to perform fraternal kindnesses that cost me some effort and sacrifice.

*To love one's neighbor as one's self, is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices.*³

¹ JOHN 13³⁴

² LUKE 6³¹

³ MARK 12³³

XII

ADVANTAGES OF FRATERNAL CHARITY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the incarnate Son of God, the source of fraternal charity. We will honor its manifestation in the primitive Church and in religious communities and in seminaries. We will thank our blessed Lord for the great benefits that result from the practice of charity in our seminary life.

II. We will consider four principal advantages that come from the practice of this virtue.

1. *Peace.* By uniting men's hearts, charity destroys the causes of dissension and enmity. It makes us wish good to our neighbor and so banishes unfriendly dispositions and their bitter consequences.

2. *Consolation and encouragement in the trials and sufferings of life.* After the solace of a loftier and more spiritual kind, the priest must depend upon human friendships formed and cemented by fraternal love.

3. *Help in our duties to others.* Nothing but the habit of solid, Christ-like love for our neighbor will give us the courage to make the sacrifices required of us by our duty. It will make us submissive to our superiors, kind to our inferiors, and gracious to our equals.

4. *Happiness.* What fraternal charity does for the blessed in heaven it will, so far as may be, accomplish in our hearts if we give it sway. It will make our social intercourse pleasant and happy.

III. In community life, such as we enjoy at the seminary, fraternal charity is a most precious virtue. As our relations with others are more intimate, our happiness is more dependent on their kindness and charity than is generally the case elsewhere. We will ask our Lord for the grace to profit by the advantages of seminary life so as to develop the spirit of charity within us.

We will resolve:

1. To realise our duty of promoting the spirit of Christian brotherly love among the members of this community;
2. To strive day after day to develop in ourselves the habit of charity in speech and in all our relations with others.

Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the incarnate Son of God, the perfect exemplar of fraternal charity; and let us honor its manifestation in the primitive Church where the early Christians so admirably practiced the love of their neighbor. But this brotherly love, which united the first

disciples of our Lord and made of them, as it were, one family in which their earthly possessions were at the service of all, could not long continue in its pristine fervor and simplicity. For, as the Church spread, as nation after nation, and thousands upon thousands entered her fold, it followed that her members became less loving and fraternal as they became less intimate.

In religious communities, however, and in seminaries we endeavor to practice this virtue in the spirit and with the fervor of the early Christian Church. Here we find a pronounced spirit of fraternal charity; here we have one heart and one soul; our interests are identical; here we have more than ordinary reasons for fraternal charity.

Let us thank our blessed Lord for having directed us to the seminary; and ask him to make peace and Christian charity rule our seminary life more thoroughly.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The better to understand and appreciate the value of fraternal charity, let us consider some of the advantages that result from the practice of this most Christian virtue.

1. Peace. By uniting men's hearts, charity destroys the causes of those dissensions and enmities which arouse disputes and which trouble otherwise peaceful souls. When charity reigns among men, everyone is at peace with his neighbor, wrangling disappears and harmony takes its place. The spirit of fraternal charity makes us wish good to our neighbor, makes us regret his falls or failures and rejoice at his successes; it makes us strive to promote his interests. How often our contentment and peace of mind is disturbed by the spirit of rivalry, envy, even hatred sometimes! But the sincere love of our neighbor would banish these unchristian dispositions and their bitter consequences.

2. Consolation and encouragement in the trials and sufferings of life. Holy Mother Church does well to call this life a vale of tears. We all must undergo trials and suffering during our sojourn in this world. Although for some of us life has thus far been pleasant and without care, although Providence has made rough ways smooth and brought high places low out of regard for our youthful weakness and inexperience, let us not blindly and thoughtlessly suppose that we are

to pass through life and into our reward without having borne any crosses.

Other men seek consolation from the affection of their family, but the priest, after the solace offered by faith in God's providence and in the love of Jesus, must depend upon friendships formed and cemented by fraternal love. We thus feel the weight of our sorrows less bitterly or at least we have more courage to support them.

Generally when we are in trouble, when we are misunderstood, when we are suffering in any way, our first desire is to lighten our cross by confiding our trouble to a sympathetic friend. *A brother that is helped by his brother, says Holy Writ, is like a strong city.*¹

3. *Help in our duties to others.* The habit of solid, Christ-like love for our neighbor will give us the courage to make the sacrifices required by fidelity and devotion, regardless of what it may cost us. We will not feel repugnance in submitting to our superiors, we will be kind to our inferiors, gracious and helpful to our equals. It will increase our zeal, for, as St. Augustine says, *zeal springs from love.*

¹ PROV., 18¹⁰

It is well for us to reflect upon the zealous, self-sacrificing devotion of men like St. Vincent de Paul. Do we know of any saint whose labor for others was more untiring, whose sympathy was more sincere? Yet a mere superficial knowledge of his life is sufficient to make clear that his constant and only motive was charity. Though we may not accomplish so great undertakings as did St. Vincent de Paul, we may, nevertheless, now in the seminary develop a habit of charity so that when we assume the duties and responsibilities of the priesthood we shall have learned to labor out of love for others.

4. *Happiness.* Next to the perfect possession of God, the greatest joy of the blessed in heaven comes from the charity that unites them to one another. In the holy society of the saints we find most perfectly verified these words of the psalmist: *How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*¹ What fraternal charity thus does in heaven it will, so far as may be, accomplish in our hearts if we give it sway. It will unite us together, making our social intercourse pleasant and agreeable. To the same extent

¹ Ps. 132¹

that coldness and unfriendliness make life sad and burdensome, will the practice of charity make it joyful and attractive. While this virtue fulfills the great commandment of our blessed Lord, it is also the source of the purest joys here on earth.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

In community life, such as we enjoy at the seminary, fraternal charity is a precious virtue. Here it is that its presence or its absence is keenly felt. For our relations here are more frequent, our contact more intimate, our happiness more dependent upon the kindness and charity of our associates than is generally the case elsewhere. If the spirit of brotherly love prevails, we are happy and contented, more zealously devoted to our work, more consoled in our trials. But if we do not exercise charitable forbearance in our relations one with another, if envy and jealousy, strife and division take the place of Christian love, how different life becomes!

My Jesus, grant that I may profit by the advantages to be derived by living in the seminary where fraternal charity with its

happy consequences should be the general practice: and grant that I may not by lack of charity become an unprofitable servant. If any seeds of uncharitableness, such as jealousies, prejudice, or habits of unkind criticism have taken root in me, help me to discover and destroy them. Grant that here in the family of thy chosen ones we may love one another as did thy disciples, that we may treat our fellow-students as such intimate brothers should be treated.

Never permit me to be the cause of division or jealousy among others. By thy grace, make me ready to sacrifice my own preferences and convenience in a spirit of brotherly love. May I broaden my sympathies so as to be indulgent, kind, and affable to all without exception.

I resolve:

1. To realize my duty of promoting the spirit of Christian brotherly love among the members of this community;
2. To strive day after day to develop in myself the habit of charity in speech and in all my relations with others.

Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum.¹

¹ Ps. 132¹

XIII

MARKS OF TRUE FRATERNAL CHARITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore Christ's perfect charity for us men. It was altogether disinterested. For what had he, the very Creator of heaven and earth, to gain by loving us? Moreover, in bestowing his love he excludes no one.
- II. We will consider that our fraternal charity should have the qualities that marked Christ's love for us; it should be unselfish, supernatural, and universal.
 1. *Our charity should be unselfish.* In loving another we ought not to have our own interest in view. Self-seeking benevolence is not charity. We must be willing to inflict pain as also to endure it ourselves out of love for our neighbor.
 2. *Our charity should be supernatural.* Not that we are required to love creatures less than we may love God more; but to love him by loving them, to love them as fellow-members of Christ's mystical body.
 3. *Our charity should be universal.* It must be extended to all, though indeed not to all in the same degree. Not only our friends and benefactors must we love, but, according to the catholic horizon of Christian charity, all, even enemies.

III. We will examine ourselves to find out whether our habitual relations with others possess the qualities of real Christian charity. Does self-love predominate in our exercises of charity? Do we find that our charity is inspired by thoughts and motives that spring from faith? Do we extend our brotherly love to all that cross our path, even to those who are unkind to us? We will ask God to strengthen and perfect our charity by the help of his powerful grace.

We will resolve to purify and broaden our love that it may become more unselfish, more universal.

A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Jesus Christ's perfect charity for us men. Through love for us he became incarnate, lived in humility and poverty, suffered the hardships and trials of his public ministry, and voluntarily gave up his life after the anguish of his cruel passion. *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*¹

Christ's love for us was utterly devoid of the slightest trace of selfishness; it was perfectly disinterested. What had he to gain by

¹ JOHN 15¹³

loving us? Not for himself, not for his own personal interests or advantage did he spend himself, but for us. And yet he knew full well that his generous love would often be repaid with indifference and even ingratitude. Christ's charity was eminently supernatural.

In bestowing his love, our blessed Lord excluded no one. Rich and poor, saint and sinner, enemy and disciple, grateful and ungrateful, all could find in him a loving Savior.

Thus, dear Lord, by the example of thy life, thou hast taught us the characteristics of true charity, showing us how thou wouldest that we should love one another: *A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love another.*¹

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider that our charity towards our brethren should have the qualities that marked Christ's love for us; it should be unselfish, supernatural, and universal.

1. *Our charity should be unselfish.* In loving another we ought not to have our own interests

¹ JOHN 13³⁴

in view, nor any personal advantage, but only the good of our neighbor himself. In our affection for him we should, so to speak, suppose ourselves in his place, wishing for him whatever good we would desire for ourselves. For such is the meaning of our Lord's precept: *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*¹ If this be the spirit of our charity, we will rejoice at our neighbor's success and happiness as we would at our own.

If, in attaching ourselves to anyone by ties of friendship or in doing good to others, we look principally to our own personal advantage, if we love him and do him good only because it is expedient for us, because his company is delightful, because his character and his manner are to our taste, then, it is not charity. Are we not rather loving ourselves and seeking our own pleasure? *Oftentimes that seemeth to be charity which is rather carnality*, says the author of the *Imitation*.²

Otherwise our charity is really vanity or self-satisfaction. If it is based on some natural attraction that leads us to be kind to our neighbor only because his company is pleasing, then our charity is not unselfish.

¹ MATTH. 22³⁹

² IMIT. I: 15²

It is not in this way that our blessed Lord has loved us, but with a most self-forgetful devotion. The same absence of personal consideration and egotism should mark our charity towards our neighbor.

2. *Our charity should be supernatural.* Indeed, there can be lawful and even virtuous affections outside of those inspired by faith and proceeding from divine grace. But if our charity is to be supernatural and hence meritorious before God, it must be founded on motives suggested by faith.

It is inherent in our nature as social beings to love one another. We naturally rejoice at the success and happiness of our friends, and we are grieved when they suffer and are sad. A sort of instinctive benevolence prompts us to relieve those in distress and to help those in need. In short, it is often a source of great pleasure and satisfaction for us to do good to others.

Now in natural affection there is nothing reprehensible. On the contrary, Christian charity adopts this as a foundation and upon it erects the edifice of a supernatural virtue. It teaches us to see in our neighbor not only a fellow-creature, but our brother in Jesus

Christ, or rather Jesus Christ himself, who by his grace lives in our brethren and who wishes thus to be loved in the members of his mystical body. When charity is practiced in this way, it becomes a theological virtue, for it is really God whom we love. *As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.*¹

3. *Our charity should be universal.* It must be extended to all, though indeed not to all in the same degree.

God's command that we love our neighbor is not qualified or limited by any restrictions. In obliging us to love the wicked as well as the good, our enemies as well as our friends, God teaches us that we should exclude no one from our charity. Jesus so loved men that he poured out his blood for all of us without exception. And the apostles, after the example of their divine Master, preached the good tidings of redemption to all. So necessary is the mark of universality among the characteristics of genuine Christian charity that it may well be called the real test of this virtue. There is no one, unless he be devoid of human sentiment, who does not love his friends and benefactors, those closely related

¹ MATTH. 25⁴⁰

to him by blood, those who have first shown him marked signs of affectionate regard. But the horizon of Christian charity is broader than this. *For if you love them that love you, says our divine Master, what reward shall you have? do not even the publicans this?*¹ If we would justly call ourselves his disciples, let us put into practice this teaching which comes down to us through the Christian centuries: *Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you.*²

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Let us examine ourselves to find out whether our habitual relations with others possess the qualities of real Christian charity.

Is our love for our neighbor unselfish or, on the contrary, is it our own profit that we seek? Does self-love predominate in our conduct towards others? When I have a chance to say a kind word or perform some generous act, do I rather consult my own pleasure and convenience?

Is our love supernatural? In order to befit a disciple of Christ it should be more than a

¹ MATTH. 5⁴⁶

² MATTH. 5⁴⁴

natural affection for what is attractive. Do we find that our charity is inspired by thoughts and motives that spring from faith?

Is our charity universal? Do we extend our brotherly love to the stranger who crosses our path, to those who have no particular personal claim on our affection, to the lowly and unlearned, to those who treat us indifferently, who are unattractive, who are even unkind to us? Or, on the other hand, do we exclude from our charity through jealousy, repugnance, or prejudice, some even among our fellow seminarians?

My conduct towards my neighbor is far from pleasing thee, my Savior, far from fulfilling thy precept of love. Do thou, the source of real charity, help me by thy grace so that I may exercise that charity which thou desirest to see in my heart. May I, by reflecting on the characteristics of thy love for man strive to make my own charity more and more like unto thine, my beloved and divine Master.

I resolve to purify and broaden my love that it may become more unselfish, more supernatural, and more universal.

A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another as I have loved you.¹

¹ JOHN 13³⁴

XIV

PRACTICE OF FRATERNAL CHARITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Lord and thank him for the wonderful manifestations of his love for men: his kind and loving deeds, the mysteries and the miracles of his entire life, especially the great sacrifice of his crucifixion. The saints of God had the same spirit of charity.
- II. We will consider that the practical exercise of charity towards our neighbor implies three conditions: we must treat him justly; we must bear with his defects; we must do him positive good.

1. *We must treat our neighbor justly.* We must accord to him that respect which is his due; and likewise avoid whatever would injure his good name, being careful also to beware of rash, unsound judgments to our neighbor's discredit.

2. *We must bear with our neighbor's defects,* remembering that we ourselves are not faultless. We should heartily forgive those who injure us. And we should learn to bear without irritation those countless little imperfections which we are prone to exaggerate in others.

3. *We must do positive good to our neighbor,* proving our charity by sympathy, kindness, and devotedness. Sympathy will lead us to share

his joys and consolations as also his griefs and trials. Our kindness will be shown by our whole outward manner. The spirit of devotedness will make us suffer inconvenience for our neighbor's sake.

III. We will regret that our views of charity have been narrow and that our practice of it yet more limited. Have we not cherished a secret ill-feeling against those who offend us? Have we not exaggerated the faults of others? Have we not neglected many proper opportunities to perform little acts of kindness for our fellows? We will implore the help of God's grace to make our conduct more conformable to his will and our Savior's perfect example.

We will resolve:

1. Carefully to avoid any injustice toward our neighbor;
2. In order to help us bear the defects of others, to recall that our own imperfections must be endured by them;
3. To practice charity in thought, word, and deed, according to Christ's maxim that we should do unto others as we would have them do to us.

As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus Christ and thank him for the wonderful manifestations of his love for men. He loved us with a sur-

passing tenderness and devotion, and to prove his love he did not hesitate to undergo the great sacrifice of his crucifixion. We are convinced of his charity not only by his own words but by his kind and loving deeds, by the mysteries and miracles of his entire life. To the just, who are his friends, he shows love by the bestowal of spiritual blessings, by the abundance of his grace and his consolations, permitting them to live on terms of intimacy with him. To sinners his love is also generous, for he patiently endures their waywardness, and with a fatherly solicitude seeks their return to him, and, when they abandon their sinful ways, he gladly welcomes them and dispenses his graces with lavish bounty.

Christ's love for us has not been sterile but has produced abundant works of kindness and mercy. And the saints, instructed by his example, have practiced a living charity, heeding the words of the blessed apostle St. John: *Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed, and in truth.*¹ We learn, for example, of the ceaseless labors of St. Charles, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, and so many

¹ I JOHN 3¹⁸

other heroes of Christian charity who have given to the world such marvelous examples of devoted service to their fellow-men. But let us bear in mind that such devotion was possible on account of their unbounded fraternal charity which sought expression in deeds of love and mercy.

Most Holy Spirit, do thou enkindle in me the earnest desire to imitate my divine Master's charity and that of his saints. Grant that I may love my neighbor with a charity fruitful in good works.

H. CONSIDERATIONS

The practical exercise of charity towards our neighbor implies three conditions: we must treat him with justice; we must bear with his defects; we must do him positive good.

1. *We must treat our neighbor justly.* Faithful observance of the requirements of justice is the necessary foundation for the supernatural virtue of charity.

In the first place, we must accord to our neighbor that respect which is his due. We must not by word or deed express contempt

or disrespect for him, as sometimes happens through raillery and derision. Even though such lack of considerateness come from thoughtlessness, it indicates the absence of the habit of charity.

In the second place, our neighbor has a right to his good name, and the inspired word of God counsels us to preserve it with great care. We can not, therefore, injure another's reputation, without becoming guilty of great injustice. We are obliged to abstain from detraction, that is from any indiscreet revelation that would tend to diminish or destroy the good opinion which others have conceived of him. The injury is, of course, a much greater injustice if calumny be added to detraction.

Let us understand and bear in mind that we can injure another's reputation by setting his faults in new relief or by accentuating them through repetition; or again by insinuations we may exaggerate their gravity and malice. By sarcastic remarks, by derisive benignity, by over much ridicule, by bitter criticism we unjustly lessen our neighbor in the esteem of others.

Our Christian brethren have a further claim on our justice, that we avoid rash, unsound judgments of them. Is it not a common thing in the seminary to form ungrounded prejudices almost at first sight or at the first disparaging criticism that comes to our ears? Does not this unjust suspicion sometimes continue for years, perhaps never to be corrected? Do we not altogether too readily attribute false and unworthy motives to our neighbor's conduct?

2. *We must bear with our neighbor's defects.* To make the practice of charity more meritorious, God permits us to be a burden to one another, he permits hardships and sacrifice to be a condition of true fraternal love. And oftentimes the more intimate our relations, the more burdensome become the defects of others. *Bear ye one another's burdens;* says the great apostle of the Gentiles; *and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ.*¹

Let us, in the first place, heartily and generously forgive those who injure us, as indeed we promise to do when we pray God to *forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

¹ GAL. 6²

There is another way in which we are called to exercise this Christian virtue: to bear those countless little defects and imperfections which we do not perceive in ourselves but which we fail not to exaggerate in others. Perhaps we object to their language, their outward conduct, their manners, their selfishness, their susceptible sensitiveness, their moodiness, their silence or talkativeness, their seriousness or their trifling temperament. But let us not forget that we are by no means faultless. Now, since we must live with others during our whole life, let us graciously bear with what does not appeal to us in our neighbor's character and disposition, realizing that he may have even greater cause for complaint against our defects but greater Christian charity to overlook them. And let us beware of jealousy or envy. Often it happens that, under the influence of our evil inclinations we are embittered by the success, talents, or approval which others enjoy, as if we became less on account of their superiority. Such a base spirit, which indeed we fear to acknowledge even to ourselves, is opposed to nobility and elevation of character, as well as to Christian charity.

3. *We must do positive good to our neighbor.* Love for our brethren, if it be genuine, will be manifested by our acts towards them. We will prove it by sympathy, kindness, and devotedness.

Sympathy leads us to share their joys and consolations as well as their griefs and trials. This is what the apostle St. Paul recommends to the faithful at Rome: *Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep.*¹ In fact, charity, by virtue of its unitive force, establishes among us a community of joys and sorrows, as it were, so that the good and evil of one become in a measure the good and evil of the others. Our human nature, unless stifled by passion, makes us instinctively express our sympathy for our fellow-men. We can not see our neighbor in pain without suffering somewhat ourselves; nor can we witness his joy without feeling something of his happiness ourselves.

Kindness. We must, when the occasion arises, testify our esteem and affection for our neighbor by our whole outward conduct, by a cordial manner, by an affability that is

not tinged with coldness. A wounded briskness, a chilling rigidity, a condescending haughtiness must be avoided no less than a false and effeminate flattery. *Be mild toward all men,*¹ says the apostle Paul.

Devotedness. Charity is obliging and devoted to the interests of others. It willingly suffers inconvenience for their sake. When we do for our neighbor an act of kindness at the cost of some effort or inconvenience, then does our sacrifice test and prove our charity. In fact, it is self-denial in the service of others that ministers to the growth of this truly Christian virtue. *All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them.*²

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

When I consider what is demanded by the exercise of that fraternal charity, my Jesus, which thou dost recommend so urgently to thy disciples, I confess that my views of this virtue have been narrow, and my practice of it yet more limited. Have I not been self-

¹ TIM. 2²⁴

² MATTH. 7¹²

centered, serving my own convenience and advantage to the neglect or even detriment of my neighbor's good? Have I observed a delicate regard for his feelings and for his reputation? In place of being amiable and serviceable to him, have I not been unwilling to help him or at least have I not performed my little offices of charity with bad grace? Instead of sharing his crosses and joys have I not often exhibited cold indifference?

Have I freely forgiven those who may have offended me in any way? Or have I preserved a secret ill-feeling towards them, rejoicing at their humiliations and failures, jealous of their success? Have I overlooked their defects or at any rate tolerated them with Christian patience mindful that others must endure my numerous imperfections?

Have I even observed the obligations of strict justice towards my neighbor, or have I not, on the contrary, often given way to unjust criticism, calumny and even sarcasm? Have I freely entertained rash and unfounded judgments regarding his character, imputed false motives to him?

My Savior, I realize that I practice but scant charity towards my brethren in this com-

munity. I ask pardon; and, by the help of thy grace, I purpose to make my conduct more conformable to thy will and perfect example.

I resolve:

1. Carefully to avoid any injustice towards my neighbor;
2. In order to help me bear the defects of others, to recall that my own imperfections must be endured by them;
3. To practice charity in thought, word, and deed, according to Christ's maxim that we should do unto others as we would have them do to us.

As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.¹

¹ MATTH. 25⁴⁰

XV

ALMSGIVING

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Savior, who loved the poor with a special tenderness. Voluntarily did he choose the lot of the poor for his own earthly life that they might more plainly see that he loved them. And holy mother Church has ever been most solicitous for the relief of her poverty-stricken children.
- II. We will consider that the duty of almsgiving is imposed upon all men, but especially upon Christians, and most particularly upon priests.

1. *Almsgiving is a universal duty.* As we are unquestionably commanded to love our neighbor, it follows, if Providence has favored us with the goods of this world, that we should exercise that charity by relieving those who are deprived of the bare necessities of life.

2. *Almsgiving is a Christian virtue.* It is more than natural benevolence; it is a religious act. For with the eye of faith we recognize in the poor a manifestation by which our Savior reveals himself to us and claims our love.

3. *Almsgiving is professedly the duty of a priest.* The priest is God's vicar in the world. And God is charity. If we are to be other Christs, must

we not practice this virtue so prominent in the life of our Savior? If we would arouse in others a charity for the poor, must we not first have in our heart a deep love for these least of Christ's brethren? The people rightly expect this in a priest as do the poor themselves.

III. Few of us have great wealth at our disposal, yet everyone can bestow alms in some degree, everyone can make some little sacrifice for the benefit of the poor. It is the actual sacrifice of the giver that God values. We will ask our Lord to develop in us a self-denying love for the poor.

We will resolve:

1. In our relations with the poor always to exercise that kindness, that respectfulness, that courtesy and consideration which Christ himself showed toward the poor;

2. Frequently to deprive ourselves of some indulgence that we may bestow its value on the poor.

Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor.

As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Jesus Christ in his special love for the poor. He did not, it is true, repel the rich; for them he suffered and died as for the rest of mankind; they receive his grace and

are called to share his eternal glory. But he has a special tenderness for the poor, who are his chosen friends and whose interests he makes particularly his own. Did he not say most explicitly that whatever is done for the least of his poor he would regard as done for himself? He, the Lord of heaven and earth, when he became incarnate, chose a life of poverty. He loved the poor. When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire whether Jesus were the Messias, our Lord draws their attention to his miraculous cures and adds: *The poor have the gospel preached to them.*¹ He always listened to their appeals with gracious kindness; he relieved their afflictions; and to his apostles he recommended the helping of the poor as one of the most meritorious works of mercy.

Holy mother Church has been most faithful to this recommendation of our Savior. For the poor have ever been the object of her most generous solicitude. Love of the destitute and unfortunate of the world, which previously had been unknown, has become a Christian virtue. Is not the history of Catholic char-

¹ MATTH. 11^b

ities and the widespread care of the poor in the Church to-day a noble monument and testimonial of her Christ-like work among men; and does it not bear witness to the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in Christ's Church?

Let us admire those saints who have been most remarkable for their love of the poor. And let us ask our Lord to inspire us with an earnest desire to imitate their example, so that we may become generous to the poor, the members of his mystical body.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The duty of almsgiving is imposed upon all men, but especially upon Christians, and most particularly upon priests.

1. *Almsgiving is a universal duty*, that is all men to whom God has given liberally of the goods of this world are bound to help the poor. This duty is a necessary consequence of the law that obliges us to love our neighbor. Can we suppose that we possess fraternal charity if, while we are blessed with the goods of this world, we remain indifferent to our brethren afflicted with poverty? We

are well dressed while they are but scantily clad; we are well fed while they are hungry; we are well housed while they suffer from the cold. Does not human pity prompt us to relieve our distressed brethren?

Although Providence has permitted the goods of this world to be distributed most unequally, yet it is not his will that some should be deprived of the bare necessities of life. To the rich he has entrusted the care of his poor. *Let your abundance supply their want,*¹ says St. Paul to the Christians at Corinth.

This duty of relieving the poor should become a source of great happiness. What method of utilizing a surplus income is better calculated to bring joy to its possessor than to make others comfortable and happy by means of it? Thou has spared us from poverty, my God, and thou wouldest have us generous towards thy suffering children.

2. *Almsgiving is a Christian virtue.* From the Christian point of view, almsgiving is more than human benevolence provoked by natural compassion at the sight of suffering;

¹ II COR. 8¹⁴

it is a religious act, and the obligation to perform it is involved in the practice of Christian piety. For, looking with the eyes of faith, we see in the poor something divine, we recognize in them a manifestation by which our Savior reveals himself to us and claims our love. He wishes us to show our love for him by relieving their needs; for, as he most explicitly tells us, he will consider any good act done to them as done to himself.

Let us recall the account which our Lord Jesus gives of the general judgment. To those who have been generous to the poor, his poor, he will say: *Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.* And when the just shall answer that they neither fed him nor clothed him, then shall he answer: *Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.*¹ This, then, is the foundation

¹ MATTH. 25³⁴⁻⁴⁰

of Christian charity and almsgiving: that we see and relieve Jesus Christ himself in our suffering brethren.

3. *Almsgiving is professedly the duty of a priest.* The priest is God's vicar in the world. And God is charity. The priest, therefore, should be the father of the poor, in whose spiritual welfare he should be greatly interested. But he will not fulfill the mission entrusted to him if he neglects the bodily and material needs of his brethren.

If we are honored with the priesthood of Jesus Christ, if we are to be other Christs, must we not practice the virtues that he manifested during his mortal life? And what moral virtue is more prominent, if we may so speak, in the life of our Savior than his love for the poor and the infirm? To console them, to help them in distress, to relieve them in affliction did he not at times even employ the omnipotence of his divinity? Surely, then, in imitation of our divine Master, we must be ever ready to help his poor.

The priest is constituted the advocate of the poor, and as such must arouse a spirit of almsgiving in the members of his flock. What will give greater eloquence to his appeals than

his example of almsgiving at the expense of his own indulgence and comfort?

The people rightly expect the priest to be the great friend of the poor. They are generous in their support and in their offerings because they feel that the priest, knowing so well the needs and deserts of the poor, will devote a considerable part of the contributions to the relief of poverty more advantageously than they could themselves.

What do the poor expect from God's priests? Often with no one else to befriend them, putting aside their pride, they lay bare to the priest the wretchedness of their poverty and distress. Should not the trust which such confidence evidences, move a man of God to generosity?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Few of us have great wealth at our disposal, yet all can bestow alms in some degree, however small. The value of an alms in the sight of God depends on the actual sacrifice of the giver. Did not our Lord commend the widow because *she of her want cast in all she had, even her whole living?*¹ Let us not think that

¹ MARK 12⁴⁴

we are excused from almsgiving because we are not wealthy. *If thou have much give abundantly, says Holy Writ; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little.*¹

My Jesus, make me understand my responsibility in the matter of almsgiving and by thy grace help me to form the habit of aiding the poor by little sacrifices. How often have I not resisted thy grace struggling to open my heart to the poor!

Develop in my heart, dear Lord, that self-denying love for the poor, that true charity which thy mortal life exemplified. The poor are thy friends, the suffering members of thy mystical body. So, in doing a kind act to them I am loving thee. My Jesus, instil this conviction in the depths of my soul that it may become a principle of my practical life.

I resolve:

1. In my relations with the poor always to exercise that kindness, that respectfulness, that courtesy and consideration which Christ himself showed towards the poor;
2. Frequently to deprive myself of some indulgence that I may bestow its value on the poor.

¹ TOBIAS 4⁹

*Blessed is he that understandeth concerning
the needy and the poor.¹*

*As long as you did it to one of these my least
brethren, you did it to me.²*

¹ Ps. 40²

² MATTH. 25⁴⁰

XVI

ZEAL

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord's ardent zeal for the salvation of souls. To devote his own mortal life to our salvation did not satisfy his generous love. So he established on earth an apostolate to continue his work for men's souls. The missionary activity in God's holy Church is a magnificent record of apostolic zeal, ready to make enormous sacrifice in the effort to win more and more souls to Christ.

II. We will try to realize the importance of zeal in a priest by considering: that it is intimately concerned with men's souls; that it bestows valuable spiritual gifts; that its motive is the highest possible, namely the glory of God.

1. *Zeal is concerned with men's souls.* In this world what is so worthy of our devotion as immortal souls? For them Christ came on earth, suffered, and died. The zealous priest nourishes men's souls with the word of life, strengthens them with divine grace, frees them from sin, encourages and cures them.

2. *Zeal bestows spiritual gifts.* How will the infinite condescension of God's incarnation move the souls of our fellow-men unless it be made

known to them? Are we conscious that our zeal must embrace those outside the fold? This same virtue will also incline us to greater care and devotion in the administration of the sacraments.

3. *The motive of zeal is the highest possible*, namely the glory of God; for the salvation of immortal souls is identical with this end. Zeal promotes God's glory by helping souls on their way to heaven. It accomplishes for our neighbor the greatest good that we can bestow. And we are thereby fulfilling the great obligations of our priesthood.

III. We will try to realize that God called us to the sacred ministry that we might coöperate with him in the work of saving souls. We will ask him to bestow upon us a generous priestly zeal, an untiring love for souls.

We will resolve:

1. Frequently to ask of God a more fervent zeal for ourselves and for all priests;
2. While in the seminary, to welcome every opportunity to exercise our zeal, especially if it entails a sacrifice.

I most gladly will spend and be spent.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord's ardent zeal for the salvation of souls. He came from heaven and assumed a human nature to save and sanctify us, thereby glorifying God and extending his heavenly kingdom.

But to devote only his own mortal life to our salvation did not satisfy his zeal. He established on earth an apostolate to continue his work for men's souls. Is not this one of the great fruits of the Incarnation? Before ascending to his Father, our blessed Savior communicated to a few disciples his love for souls and invested them with his divine power, commanding them to spread the glad tidings of redemption over the whole world.

In obedience to this command of the Master the apostles spread the faith far and wide. They preached the word of life, and, to attest the truth of their preaching, they gladly poured out their blood, crowning a life of labor with a martyr's death. They left successors in the apostolate. The history of God's holy Church is a standing testimony to the presence of an apostolic zeal which has ever sought to win more and more souls to Christ.

And even in our day are there not zealous missionaries who willingly encounter great hardships and danger to bring the light of Christianity to those that sit in the darkness of paganism. Leaving country, friends, kindred, the comfortable life which might be

theirs, they devote their energies to the tireless but blessed work of preaching the gospel of our Savior.

And are there not in this country, perhaps among those whom we know, many priests zealously devoted to the interests of immortal souls? Let us not congratulate ourselves on being better than the worst, but let us rather propose for our own imitation the example of those whose zeal we admire.

Let us adore our Lord, the model whom all apostolic men have tried to follow and the source of the grace which inspires their zeal.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us try to realize the importance of zeal in a priest by considering: that it is intimately concerned with men's souls; that it bestows valuable spiritual gifts; that its motive is the highest possible, namely, the glory of God.

1. *Zeal is concerned with men's souls.* What almsgiving does for the bodily wants of the poor, zeal does for the souls of men. And what is there in this world so worthy of our devotion and esteem as immortal souls? It was for the salvation of men that Christ came

upon earth, purchasing for them the right to heaven by his incarnation and suffering. The truly apostolic priest remembers that the souls entrusted to his care are very precious in the eyes of God; and he is happy at the privilege of consecrating all his efforts, night and day, year after year, to their welfare. They come to him starving for the word of life and he feeds them, dying for the want of divine help and he bestows divine grace upon them, enslaved by sin and he frees them, disgusted with life and despairing of cure and he encourages and cures them. What an honor for man thus to become the agent of Jesus Christ, another Christ!

2. *Zeal bestows precious spiritual gifts.* The zealous priest will be ever ready and eager to dispense the word of God to destitute souls. We rightly consider that it is a great blessing to mankind that the Son of God should become man and reveal to us the eternal truths for which our souls hunger, that he should show us the way to heaven, and establish a Church to continue that teaching until the end of time. But how will this infinite condescension of God help the souls of our fellow-men unless it be made known to them?

It is necessary, then, to communicate the word of God to each if we would dispel ignorance and doubt, if we would direct souls in the way of virtue. Almighty God has willed that men should learn his truth not directly from himself nor from angels but from the priests of his Church. It is priestly apostolic zeal that brings God's revelation to men. Christ sends us into the world to teach. Let us not, therefore, neglect this duty, for it is an essential function of our ministry. This may mean the teaching of catechism, preaching, informal instructions, perhaps the writing of books. Do we prepare with serious care for these occasions? Do we turn to good account every opportunity to enlighten and instruct our people, who know far too little of their religion?

Our zeal must embrace those outside the fold. *Other sheep I have, says our Lord, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.*¹ We are living in the midst of thousands who have never heard the voice of the Good Shepherd or who have

¹ JOHN 10:16

strangely misunderstood that voice. What an opportunity for the exercise of zeal! If we do not devote ourselves entirely to the missionary work of spreading the faith, at least we can overcome much prejudice, we can plant the seed and trust to God for the increase.

A priest is ordained not only to instruct the faithful and extend God's kingdom on earth, but also to dispense divine grace by the administration of the sacraments. Christ has appointed the priests as his successors not only to preach his gospel but to dispense his sacraments, the ordinary channels of his grace. In the Mass, in the administration of the sacraments, in his prayers the priest is the daily dispenser of the mysteries of God. By zeal the priest seeks the sheep that have strayed from the fold and cleanses them from their sins; he strengthens them against future temptation and helps them obey God's law. To their troubled souls he brings the priceless peace of Christ's friendship.

With St. Peter he can say: *Silver and gold I have none; but what I have, I give thee.*¹

¹ ACTS 3¹

3. *The motive of zeal is the highest possible*, namely the glory of God and the salvation of immortal souls. These are not different ends but the same end considered from different points of view. A priest who exercises an apostolic zeal labors to lead souls to life eternal, to rescue them from the exile of hell and help them attain to the endless possession of the blessedness of heaven. Thus we may see that the exercise of zeal promotes the glory of God while at the same time it is not without great advantage both to our neighbor and to ourselves.

The glory of God. As the greatest glory which God derives from creatures consists in their eternal praise and adoration of him in heaven, so in our life on earth we can best promote his glory by helping men attain to their heavenly reward. This the zealous priest accomplishes by diligently administering to their spiritual life from the time of their regeneration in baptism to their last absolution at the time of death; and even afterwards by his prayers he aids in securing their release from detention in purgatory.

The good of our neighbor. What greater charity can we exercise for our neighbor, than

to help him save his soul? As priests it is our privilege to restore men to the friendship of Christ, to bring holy souls into more intimate union with him; in short, our mission is to do for our fellow-men what our Savior himself did for men while upon earth.

Our own profit. In the exercise of zeal we become coöoperators with almighty God in his work, the sanctification of souls. This is the end of creation, of the providential government of the universe. For this purpose the word of God became incarnate and established his Church among men. And we are honored and privileged with this obligation of our priesthood, to help God in the great work of salvation. As St. Paul says: *We are God's coadjutors.*¹ Rightly, then, did St. Denis say: *The most godly of all divine works is to coöperate with God in saving souls.*²

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, thou hast called me to the holy priesthood. And why hast thou done so? It was that I might consecrate myself entirely

¹ COR. 3⁰

² *De Cœlesti Hierarchia*, c. 3.

to the work of saving souls. Not only is devotion to souls a meritorious and holy work, but in a priest it is a primary and fundamental obligation.

Years ago thou didst enkindle in my heart the spark of divine love that made me wish to labor for others' salvation. It is thy wish to have this spark kindled in thy service. *I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I, but that it be kindled?*¹ Since my vocation came from thee, deign also to bestow upon me a generous priestly zeal. Grant me a great love for souls, a devoted, untiring love such as I see manifested by all truly holy priests. May I always be ready to sacrifice my own convenience to the eternal welfare of others, so that I may count no labor, no fatigue, no sacrifice too great in the work of salvation. May my zeal grow continually that I may say with the great apostle: *I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.*²

I resolve:

1. Frequently to ask of God a more fervent zeal for myself and for all priests;

¹ LUKE 12⁴⁹

² II COR. 12¹⁵

2. While in the seminary, to welcome every opportunity to exercise my zeal especially if it entails a sacrifice.

I most gladly will spend and be spent.



XVII

BAD EXAMPLE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore Jesus Christ, our perfect model and exemplar, who pronounced such startling condemnations against those who give scandal. And we will thank him for these salutary warnings.
- II. That we may better appreciate our obligation not to give bad example, we will consider that the one who gives scandal destroys the souls of men, is the enemy of Christ, and the coöoperator of the devil.

1. *Bad example destroys the souls of men.* The true death of the soul is mortal sin; hence the grave iniquity of leading anyone into sin by giving scandal. We should avoid bad example even in matters of less moment.

2. *Bad example is the enemy of Christ.* By it we oppose the work for which our Lord came into the world, namely the glory of his heavenly Father and the salvation of men.

3. *Bad example makes us the coöoperators of the devil.* The priest, professedly a teacher of morality, is looked up to by all as a living example of what he teaches. What a treason for him to coöperate with the devil and to ruin souls that he is commissioned to save.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have been careful to avoid bad example. And we will regret the imprudent words and acts by which we have scandalized others.

We will resolve:

1. To guard our speech and acts so as not to give bad example;
2. At our daily and weekly examination of conscience to recall the bad example that we have given.

Ab occultis meis munda me et ab alienis parce servo tuo.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore Jesus Christ, our perfect model and example, who pronounced such terrible condemnations against scandal. *He that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of scandal. For it must needs be that scandals come: but nevertheless woe to that man by whom the scandal cometh.*¹ Is not this a severe denunciation? Once, when addressing the Pharisees, he rebuked them for this sin in unmistakable terms: *Woe to you scribes*

¹ MATTH. 18⁶⁻⁷

*and Pharisees, hypocrites, he said; because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men, for you yourselves do not enter in; and those that are going in, you suffer not to enter.*¹

Let us thank our blessed Lord for these salutary warnings, and let us try to comprehend the gravity and sinfulness of scandal. The words and example of Christ should awaken in us a realization of our duty to edify and encourage others by good example. This is a consequence of the great law of fraternal charity.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

If we are commanded to love our neighbor, it follows that we must not by bad example place any obstacles in the way of his salvation. We are all obliged to help one another by our good example. Hence to scandalize our brethren is a sin. Now, we commit scandal every time that by word or act we cause our neighbor to offend God. Indeed, it is more or less grievous according to the degree of our influence and the seriousness of his offense. But it is always a sin that we must avoid because it destroys the souls of men, is the enemy

¹ MATTH. 23¹³

of Jesus Christ, and is especially sinful in a seminarian or a priest.

1. *Bad example destroys the souls of men.* The true death of the soul is mortal sin, which estranges us from God. Hence the iniquity and gravity of leading any one into sin. Is not such an act more grievous than to inflict bodily suffering or material injury upon our neighbor?

Such is our guilt if by word and example we become the occasion of another's fall. A truly Christian man by his good example encourages others to abandon their sinful ways, to respond to the inspirations of grace, to attain to their final blessedness. But the evil effects of grievously bad example are beyond our sight and calculation. We have, however, seen men led deeper and deeper into sin by the bad example of comrades.

Let us beware of the sophistry by which, though abhoring mortal sin, we easily excuse bad example in matters of less moment. We would not indeed commit so grave a scandal as to lead a soul directly into mortal sin. But do we duly appreciate the pernicious and far-reaching effects of scandalous negligences and indiscretions even in our common every-day practices?

2. *Bad example is the enemy of Jesus Christ.* By inducing others to sin, by diminishing their piety, we oppose the work for which Jesus Christ came into the world. He became incarnate, suffered, and died for two great ends—two, yet one and the same: the glory of God and the salvation of men. By his ministry on earth and by the priests of his Church he has glorified his heavenly Father through the sanctification of men's souls. While Christ's work honors his Father, our bad example dishonors him; while Christ, by himself and by all holy priests, exercises an apostolate of grace, the scandal that we give leads men away from such holy inspirations; while Christ is winning souls to God, our example helps to fill the ranks of the deserters.

St. Paul, warning the Corinthians not to scandalize their brethren by eating meat sacrificed to idols, innocent though such a practice was in itself, says: *When you sin thus against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.*¹ St. Bernard goes still farther and ranks those who give scandal among the persecutors of Christ. *Is not he*

¹ I COR. 8¹²

*manifestly a persecutor of Christ who, by his bad example, induces others to act negligently . . . or, who grieves the Holy Spirit by scandalizing one of those little ones that believe in him?*¹

3. *Bad example makes us the coöoperators of the devil*, who is the irreconcilable adversary of Christ. Knowing that our Savior came into this world to destroy his pernicious empire over men's souls, he has vowed an eternal hatred against the Lord. He can, of course, in no way injure the adorable person of Christ; but he wages war against Christ's saints and uses what power God has given him to tempt us. He it was that led our first parents into sin; and he has ever since devoted himself to the work of tempting men to offend their God.

Is not this the very effect of scandal? Whether we deliberately wish it or not, our bad example, in leading others to sin, is accomplishing the work of the devil. Like him it is a tempter; it works for him and in coöperation with him; it aids him to combat the interests of Christ and to destroy the souls of men.

¹ *De conversione S. Pauli, 2.*

Let us not too readily excuse our bad example by alleging that we do not suspect the gravity of its evil consequences. It is true that lack of reflection often diminishes our guilt. But this does not prevent the lamentable ruin of souls that are thereby led into sin.

The heinousness of scandal is greatly increased when we find it in a priest, consecrated to God's service, the deputed representative of Christ in the world, the official defender of his interests. What a treason it is to this most sacred obligation for a priest to coöperate with the devil by giving bad example, to destroy souls whom he is commissioned to save!

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, thou hast called me to thy ministry wherein one of my greatest means of accomplishing good will be the force of good example. Am I careful now to avoid bad example? Perhaps I have discouraged fellow seminarians from an effort after greater perfection by my laxity, by charging their noble ideas with exaggeration, by ridiculing and making light of their regularity.

My Jesus, I regret the untimely remarks and imprudent acts by which I have scandalized others and led them astray. Pardon my offences, merciful Lord; by thy grace make me realize how serious may be the effect of my example and how in charity I am expected to edify others; grant that no one should lose his immortal soul on account of the bad example that I may have given. In the future I will exercise more vigilant care upon my exterior conduct so as not only to avoid scandal but also to fulfil the precept of Christian charity by affording the encouragement of good example to those with whom I live.

I resolve:

1. To guard my speech and acts so as not to give bad example;
2. At my daily and weekly examination of conscience to recall the bad example that I have given.

Ab occultis meis munda me et ab alienis parce servo tuo.¹

¹ Ps. 18¹³⁻¹⁴

XVIII

RELIGION

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore almighty God who justly requires of us the practice of religion, the homage that belongs essentially to his sovereign perfection. We will contemplate our blessed Lord in whom and by whom alone God can be truly honored.
- II. We will reflect upon the four acts embraced by the virtue of religion: adoration, thanksgiving, petition, expiation.

1. *Adoration.* We ought to acknowledge with heart and tongue God's sovereign majesty. And we should have a sense of humble veneration for his adorable name and for everything that pertains to his worship.

2. *Thanksgiving.* We must acknowledge favors received, praise and thank our benefactor, bestow upon him favor for favor according to our ability.

3. *Prayer.* God requires that we be always disposed to ask of him the graces and blessings of which we stand in need. Prayer has ever been considered as one of the principal acts of the virtue of religion.

4. *Expiation.* The introduction of sin into the world, into our lives, has necessitated the duty of atonement.

III. We will acknowledge that the practice of religion is imposed upon the priest in a very special manner, and is expected of him in a more than ordinary degree. Have we devoted ourselves heartily to the practice of the four great duties involved in this virtue? We will ask our Lord to develop in us the religious dispositions becoming our sacred calling.

We will resolve to be more faithful in the practice of the duties of religion, namely adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, and expiation.

Know that you are called to the practice of piety and religion.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore almighty God who justly imposed on us the duty of religion. In his infinite perfection he has no more need of our homage than he had of creating us; for in himself is to be found his perfect bliss. But, having brought into the world free rational beings, men capable of knowing him and of paying religious worship to his divine majesty, he requires of them the homage that belongs essentially to his sovereign perfection. Prostrate in spirit before him, let us acknowledge him our Lord and Master; let us pay our homage for all that we have and all that we are; and let us ask him to impress the respect for

his divine majesty more and more deeply in our soul.

In humble adoration let us contemplate our model Jesus Christ, as the perfect worshipper of God. He deserves this title because in his religion to his heavenly Father, Christ attained an absolute perfection altogether beyond the power of any creature, and because it is only in him and by him that God can be truly honored as he deserves to be. Our worship will please God if only it is offered by Jesus Christ and in union with him.

By communicating this virtue of religion to his Church, he wished to honor God in all places, and to fill heaven and earth with the worship of his Father. This he accomplished by associating with his own religion the worship of saintly men on earth, especially bishops and priests, who by their vocation are the specially ordained interpreters and imitators of the religious spirit of our divine Master.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Religion, like sacrifice, its highest expression, embraces four acts, namely, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, expiation.

1. *Adoration.* God is an infinite being in whom is found every conceivable perfection. His sovereign majesty is far beyond our imagination or highest conception. Then, too, he is our Creator, who made us out of nothing by his all-powerful word and from whom we receive all that we possess. Hence we belong absolutely to him and his supremacy over us is unlimited. The prerogatives of God, taught by reason and by faith, we ought to acknowledge and profess with heart and tongue. God alone is truly great, powerful, independent and eternal; whereas creatures, however lofty the dignity of their station, are as nothing before the Almighty on whom they are wholly dependent.

As a consequence of God's supreme majesty, we should have a sense of humble veneration for him, for his divine attributes, for his adorable name, for everything that pertains to his worship, for all the manifestations of his power. This disposition of our heart should be outwardly expressed by our language, our attitude, all the evidences of sincere respect. We should avow our complete dependence upon him. And we should strive to make him better known and honored.

2. *Thanksgiving*, that is the expression of gratitude which the remembrance of God's bounty towards us should elicit. According to St. Thomas, gratitude consists in three things; that we acknowledge favors received, that we praise and thank our benefactor, and that we bestow upon him favor for favor, according to our ability. These three duties are imposed on me in regard to any ordinary benefactor and, should I be wanting in these obligations, I would be guilty of ingratitude. Is it not then reasonable that I should be more thankful to almighty God, the supreme Giver of all that I possess?

I ought, in the first place, to acknowledge that I have received from almighty God everything that I call mine and to look upon my greatest treasures as the gifts of his generous bounty. Perhaps he has favored me with exceptional opportunities and talents in one way or another. Then should I acknowledge that they come from him as free gifts. In this spirit did our blessed Lord receive all during his mortal life, he regarded all as the expression of his Father's generous providence.

We should praise and thank God for his munificence. Among men, when the poor and

the unfortunate become recipients of the charity of some fellow-creatures, the more wretched and abandoned their lot and the more bountiful the charity of their benefactor, the deeper and more profound should be their gratitude. If we but reflect for a few moments on the extent of God's mercies towards us, we will realize that our thankfulness ought, therefore, to be the strongest, the most sincere and profound of which we are capable.

But what can we return to God for his immense prodigality? He has no need of any of our possessions; nor does our homage and adoration increase his glory. What he asks of us, then, let us give generously, fidelity to his law, horror for sin, the glorification of his holy name, and zealous devotion to the spread of his kingdom in the souls of men.

3. *Prayer.* Although God has been generous and merciful to us, we are continually in need of his further assistance. From him come health and happiness and all good things. Must we not beg of him to preserve and develop in our souls the life of grace which we received in the sacrament of baptism? The divine assistance, the influence of grace to strengthen us against temptation, is necessary at every moment of our lives.

Although God bestows upon us countless blessings unasked, although he foresees our petitions, he requires, nevertheless, that we should be always disposed to ask of him the graces and blessings of which we stand in need. Prayer is the great means of obtaining grace, it testifies to our dependence on God, it is an avowal of our powerlessness when left to ourselves.

At all times prayer, therefore, has been considered not only as an essential element of the virtue of religion, but also as one of the principal acts of that virtue, for among all peoples the word "prayer" is used to designate the collection of religious duties that man owes to God.

In Holy Writ, especially in the Gospel, prayer is regarded, not as a pious work of supererogation and of perfection, not as a highly commendable counsel, but as an obligatory practice imposed upon us all. *We ought always to pray, and not to faint.*¹

4. *Expiation.* We might call adoration, thanksgiving, and prayer the essential duties of religion. But the introduction of sin into

¹ LUKE 18¹

the world gives rise to a fourth, expiation. Though the Son of God by his suffering and death reconciled man with the Father still we have to unite our own expiations to that of Christ, an obligation which must be fulfilled either in this life or in the life to come.

Expiation is a humble and repentant disavowal by which we acknowledge the iniquity of sin, retract it as far as may be in our power, and conceive a true sorrow for our sin, endeavoring to repair the offence which we have committed.

It is furthermore the acceptance of the punishment which our sins deserve. He who is truly penitent does not wait for Providence to inflict upon him a penalty for his sins; he anticipates the severity of divine justice, so to speak, by punishing himself, by imposing voluntary penances upon himself—a most meritorious and pleasing practice in the sight of God.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Clearly the duty of adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, and expiation, that is, the practice of religion is imposed upon the priest in a

very special manner and is expected of him in a more than ordinary degree. As Christ he might be called God's worshipper. He must honor and glorify God not only in fulfilment of a personal obligation, but in the name of the whole Church, whose representative and minister he is. Many of the functions of his ministry recall this sacred obligation. But there are in particular two acts that he performs every day which emphatically recall this duty: the holy sacrifice of the Mass, in which he offers to God the only victim capable of fully honoring him as he deserves; and the recitation of the breviary, which is the expression and the echo of the religious duties that Christ pays to the divine Majesty.

It is greatly to be feared, dear Lord, that I have not appreciated the extent and gravity of this eminently priestly obligation to practice the virtue of religion. Have I devoted myself heartily to the practice of the four duties involved in that virtue? To what extent do I honor almighty God; with what dispositions do I stand in his presence, especially during the sacrifice of the Mass? Do I humbly acknowledge his absolute sway?

Do I not often forget or neglect the duty of returning thanks to God? Do I frequently thank him for the temporal favors which he bestows upon me, the many unusual opportunities with which he may have favored me? Am I sincerely grateful for the gift of a vocation to his holy priesthood? And do I show my appreciation by striving to correspond thereto?

My Jesus, develop in me the religious dispositions becoming my sacred calling. Since unassisted I am unable to offer fit and worthy homage to God, I unite mine to the adoration and praise by which thou dost continually glorify our heavenly Father. Thou dost wish to live in thy priests by their acts of religious adoration, their thanksgiving, their humble prayers, and their penitential expiation.

I resolve to be more faithful in the practice of the duties of religion, namely, adoration, thanksgiving, prayer, and expiation.

Know that you are called to the practice of piety and religion.¹

¹ Council of Milan, IV.

XIX

PATIENCE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Lord Jesus. We will contemplate the example furnished by his entire life on earth, his mild forbearance with the obtuseness and blindness of his apostles, the calm suffering of his holy passion. We will thank him for the living example of his patient life and death.
- II. We will consider the chief benefits that come from true patience.

1. *It testifies our love for God.* The highest expression of that love is to will what he wills. And this is the spirit in which the virtue of patience urges us to endure the hardships of life.

2. *By it we offer a meritorious sacrifice to God.* Our Savior, in redeeming us by the way of pain and suffering, shows us that we must practice patient resignation if we would be his disciples. The sacrifices that we offer to God in the practice of this virtue are the crosses which God himself gives us to bear.

3. *It gives us peace of mind.* All the powers of a soul habitually patient are to a considerable extent subjected to its authority. Peace comes not so much from gratifying our desires as from contentment with what God is pleased to give.

III. We will acknowledge that one way to worship God is by the prayer of Calvary, that is by the patient acceptance of affliction in submission to his divine will. We will reflect upon our blessed Master's perfect example and ask for the grace to practice this holy virtue more faithfully in the future.

We will resolve:

1. To avail ourselves of the frequent occasions for the practice of patience;
2. To suppress the first outward signs of impatience and thereby help to quiet the interior spirit of unrest and dissatisfaction.

In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus. Let us contemplate the example of patience furnished by his entire life on earth. Without the least murmur he endured the privations of his infancy, the labors of his youth, the obtuseness and blindness of his chosen apostles! Let us reflect upon his sadness when the Jews, whom he would convert and save, reject him on all sides, when the prince of the apostles denies him. But he accepts all this as the way marked out for him by his heavenly Father.

On that awful Thursday night when, at sight of the world's sins in all their iniquity,

his soul grew sorrowful even unto death and he prayed the Father to remove this chalice from him, in what spirit did he bear his suffering? *Not my will, but thine be done.* Then came his betrayal, the flight of his apostles, save Peter and John, his unjust condemnation and cruel scourging, the crucifixion.

We thank thee, dear Lord, for the example of thy patient life and death. And we will try, as best we can, to cultivate such a spirit of patience, flowing from confident trust in thy goodness and a humble resignation to thy divine will. *Jesu patientissime, miserere nobis.*

II. CONSIDERATIONS

1. *The nature of patience.* Through Christian patience we endure the pains and sufferings of life without complaint, in the spirit of submission to the holy will of God who permits them or sends them to us. True patience does not deem every difficulty and opposition as providential or invincible and therefore to be mildly endured. Nor, on the other hand, does it fret and chafe under every burden. It does not produce feeble characters, so apathetic, so dejected, so readily disheartened by unsuccess-

ful effort or disappointment, that they yield to the slightest resistance without making the effort that God expects of them and even disparage the commendable zeal of others.

Let us not call such weak pusillanimity by the name of patience. Let us not so constantly expect suffering and persecution and failure that we mistake for them what is really the consequence of our own neglect or sloth. This is plainly shifting to our Creator the responsibility for our own faults.

Patience is a strong, sturdy, manly virtue. Mindful that *whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth*,¹ it is not quickly discouraged under affliction, but accepts its trials and suffering as permitted by Providence and so endures them without murmur or complaint.

We should practice patience to testify our love for God, to offer a meritorious sacrifice to him, and to procure peace of mind for ourselves.

1. *Patience testifies our love for God.* True love of God does not consist in words nor in sentiments. Its highest expression is to be found in the act of the will by which we make God our last end, will what he wills, desire

¹ PROV. 3¹²

what he desires, identifying, as it were, his will with ours. The more closely we approach this union with God, the more shall we find that whatever is outside of his good pleasure is not of deep concern for us.

How different is the practice of Christian patience from the insensibility of the Stoic's proud contempt for suffering, his indifference toward the pleasures of this world as toward its hardships! It is essentially a religious disposition of the soul by which in our sufferings and afflictions we bow our head in joyful submission to the will of our heavenly Father who thus enables us to prove our love for him. *I was dumb, and I opened not my mouth,* says he psalmist, *because thou hast done it.*¹

This is the spirit in which the virtue of patience urges us to endure the hardships of life. It teaches us to regard them as crosses permitted by divine Providence, who in his infinite wisdom and mercy adjusts all for our ultimate good. Thus should we see the hand of God in our afflictions. When, from the supernatural point of view to which this virtue elevates us, we accept all these burdens with

¹ Ps. 38¹⁰

generous resignation, we can say with the apostle Paul: *Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities. . . . I please myself in my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ.*¹

2. By the practice of patience we offer the most *meritorious sacrifice to God*, for we thereby attach ourselves to him in the purity of love. Our blessed Savior himself by the atoning sacrifice of Calvary, in redeeming us by the way of pain and suffering, shows us that in imitation of him we must practice patient resignation if we would be his disciples.

The sacrifices that we offer to God in the practice of this virtue have a distinct merit of their own. Whereas voluntary sacrifices that we impose upon ourselves are the work of our own choice, these are the crosses which God himself gives us to bear. This patient endurance is especially pleasing to him since he imposes them on us and since in submitting to them we can fulfil his divine will more perfectly and we immolate to him even our will. In our voluntary offerings and penances we may easily by indiscreet ardor be led beyond

¹ II COR. 12⁹⁻¹⁰

bounds and self-love may secretly insinuate itself. But in exercising the virtue of patience there is little danger of excess; for patience consists in an internal disposition and not in the performance of certain outward acts that may be seen and praised by men.

3. The practice of patience gives us *peace of mind*. All the powers of a soul habitually patient are to a considerable extent subjected to its authority; the patient soul governs and directs its activities into their proper channels. Peace comes not so much from gratifying our desires nor from desiring little as from contentment with what God is pleased to give. Is it not true that the happiest and most tranquil souls are not those who have abundance, who suffer little, who sacrifice nothing, whose trials are few or insignificant, but rather those who accept their suffering and trials, whether great or little, as coming from the hand of our loving Father? The former may be ruffled by trifles; the latter generally retain a deep-seated and peaceful serenity even under severe afflictions. Experience teaches us that the principal causes which disturb our peace of mind are worry over past failures, murmuring dissatisfaction with the present, and nerv-

ous anxiety for the future. But patient resignation to the manifest will of God is the surest antidote to these disturbing causes.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Thou hast taught that besides the adoration of thy divine perfections and the enjoyment of thy holy presence—the prayer of Mount Thabor, as it were, there is also what we may call the prayer of Calvary—union with thee and willing acceptance of affliction, the practice of Christian patience. By it also I can do reverence to thee, I can prove my love for thee, my God, and draw down upon myself the abundance of thy graces.

Thou, my divine Master, gavest to the world a perfect example of patience during thy entire life but especially by thy sacred passion. It is thy wish that I should, by resignedly bearing the pains and sufferings of my life, however insignificant they may be, unite them to the agony, the humiliations and the desolation of thy passion.

But such a disposition in my soul must be the work of thy grace without which I am weak and incapable of the continual practice

of supernatural virtue. Dear Lord, communicate to my soul a power which will enable me to endure not only with resignation but even with joy whatever trials may befall me from time to time. Especially may I accept in humble submission those numerous little crosses that daily try my patience—slight physical suffering, difficulties in fulfilling my regular duties, exercises that may become distasteful, depression of spirits and the like.

I resolve:

1. To avail myself of the frequent occasions for the practice of patience;
2. To suppress the first outward signs of impatience and thereby help to quiet the interior spirit of unrest and dissatisfaction.

*In patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras.*¹

¹ LUKE 21¹⁹

XX

OBEDIENCE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore almighty God and acknowledge his right to require of us obedience to our superiors, whom he invests with some of his own authority. We will admire the example of obedience given us by our divine Master during his mortal life.

II. Obedience is the conformity of our acts to the express will of our superiors in the legitimate exercise of their authority. We will consider its practice as an obligation, as an excellent virtue, and as a source of much good to ourselves and to others.

1. *Obedience is an obligation.* In the government of humanity God has deputed his authority to rulers to whom, therefore, we owe obedience in the sphere of their jurisdiction. Obedience is then a sacred and universal duty.

2. *Obedience is an excellent virtue.* We should strive to regard our human superiors as the representatives of God's authority, recognizing in their right to our submission the order established by divine Providence. Obedience practiced in this spirit is an act of homage to God.

3. *Obedience is a source of much good to ourselves and to others. For ourselves it is a sure means of sanctification, since we are thereby certain of pleasing God, and it is a great help to our peace of mind.*

It also procures valuable benefits *to others*: for it is an essential condition of good order in society; and it lightens the burden of our superiors.

III. A virtue which is so pleasing to God we should cultivate with great care. We will ask ourselves whether we have grown careless in the exercise of this virtue and whether our outward observances are prompted by the true spirit of obedience. We will pray for God's grace to help us develop the virtue of obedience in our soul.

We will resolve:

1. To cultivate a great interior respect for the authority of those placed over us, regarding them as the representatives of God;
2. To restrain any tendency to criticise or blame them;
3. To develop more perfectly within us the true spirit of obedience.

Be subject . . . not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore almighty God, the supreme Master of all creation; and let us acknowledge his right to require of us obedience not only

by his direct commands but also through our superiors, whom he invests with his authority.

Let us admire the example of obedience given us by our divine Master during his mortal life. Not only did he obey his Father from the crib to the Cross, but we sum up the whole period of his hidden life in these simple words of the evangelist, where he describes Christ's submission to the parental authority of Mary and Joseph: *He was subject to them.*¹

By this example of thy life-long obedience, dear Lord, thou hast taught us to respect the legitimate authority of our superiors. Thy eminent dignity freed thee from any obligation of submission. It was for thee, absolute Master of all, to command rather than obey. Yet thou didst prefer to be our model in this as in all virtues.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Obedience inclines us to conform our acts to the express will of our superiors in whom we see God's representatives. Let us consider

¹ LUKE 2⁵¹

that it is an obligation, an excellent virtue, and a source of much good to ourselves and to others.

1. *Obedience is an obligation.* In the government of humanity almighty God has deputed his authority to rulers, to each of whom, therefore, we owe obedience in the sphere of his jurisdiction. Hence we should regard the just and legitimate commands of our superiors and also the habitual practices prescribed by our rule as the expression of God's holy will in our regard. *Let every soul be subject to higher powers: for there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God.*¹ In virtue of this great principle we see in our superior not a man but God who speaks to us through him.

Nor is God's command less worthy of our respect and obedience because it is intimated through our superiors.

To refuse obedience to lawfully constituted authority is to refuse it to God himself. Let us not for a moment suppose this is a virtue practiced only by the most spiritual ascetics or a burden imposed only on the clergy, but

¹ ROM. [13]

let us bear in mind that men all have superiors invested with the right of commanding. Obedience is, therefore, to some extent a necessity of social life. But it may well be that we will profit most from the practice of this virtue when it is not thus a matter of necessity, when it is a voluntary surrender of our judgment or inclination to the will of a fellow-man or to rules established and imposed by our fellow-men.

2. *Obedience is an excellent virtue.* We are aware that obedience is for the most part actually animated by one of three motives. We obey because our reason prescribes such or such duty, and we fear the consequences that disobedience would entail. This is good, but not as meritorious as when we obey God who commands us, simply because it is God who commands us, and we are glad to sacrifice our reason to his infinite wisdom. Such obedience however is not as admirable as when we strive to regard our human superiors as the representatives of God's authority and to acquire intelligent, sympathetic obedience to them as to the more direct commands of God; that is to say, viewing our acts from his point of view, willing what he wills and,

so far as possible, for the same good reasons. For there is greater sacrifice demanded from us than in the case of a direct command from God.

Perhaps in our superior, whose will is imposed on ours, we find more weakness than strength, perhaps he has neither knowledge nor eminent virtue to recommend him, perhaps we are justly assured that we excel him in wisdom and experience. In short, his only right to our submission may be his position of authority. But in this we recognize the order established by divine authority. Obedience practiced in this spirit is an excellent homage to God, a complete abnegation of self most highly valued by the saints.

3. *Obedience is a source of much good to ourselves and to others. For ourselves it is a sure means of sanctification and a great help to peace of mind.*

A means of sanctification. In obeying we are sure to please God, who manifests his will through his representatives. In those enterprises which we undertake of our own volition we are in danger of being misled by our disordered inclinations and selfish desires: but obedience directs our acts in accord with God's

holy will. We are confident thereby of pleasing God.

Peace of mind. Those acts which we are obliged to perform through obedience we may undertake without hesitation or disquiet. We are bound merely to do as we are ordered, whereas our superiors are responsible to God for what they command. *Wherever there is prompt obedience,* says Thomas à Kempis, *there is peaceful conscience.*¹

Obedience is also the source of much good *for others.* It is an essential condition of good *order in society.* Where the spirit of obedience is most nearly perfect, there is society most peaceful and well-ordered. It helps most efficiently to prevent friction and discord in human organizations, from the family to the most extensive states, and even in the Church.

The spirit of good will and confidence in which we should obey will greatly *lighten the burden of our superiors.* St. Paul writes: *Obey your prelates and be subject to them. For they watch as being to render an account of your souls; that they may do this with joy, and not*

¹ *Hort. Rosar.* 18.

with grief.¹ Often the position of authority abounds in hardship and bitterness whether because of the worry and care that it involves or because of the grave responsibilities that weigh so heavily on those exercising authority. The difficulty becomes well nigh unbearable when the just commands of superiors encounter opposition and ill-will; while ready obedience lightens their burden.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

I ought to cultivate with great care a virtue which is so pleasing to thee, my God, which is so clearly a way of conforming my acts to thy holy will, which is so important in the training of my character and which I may put into practice many times every day.

Have I grown excessively careless in the exercise of this virtue and are my outward observances prompted by routine instead of by the true spirit of obedience? Am I trying to elevate my obedience to a supernatural virtue, making it the occasion and means of obeying the will of God? If I have to reproach

myself with remissness in the practice of this virtue, I beg of thee, my God, to forgive my fault and by thy grace to help me make greater effort in the future to develop a genuine spirit of obedience.

I resolve:

1. To cultivate a great interior respect for the authority of those placed over me, regarding them as the representatives of God;
2. To restrain any tendency to criticise or blame them;
3. To develop more perfectly within me the true spirit of obedience.

Be subject . . . not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake.¹

¹ ROM. 13⁵

XXI

NATURE OF HUMILITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the Word made flesh giving us the most perfect example of humility, him who made man himself abdicating, as it were, his divine prerogatives, becoming man, and dwelling among us. We will thank him for instructing us in humility by the example of his life.
- II. Humility consists in having a true appreciation of ourselves. To understand its nature we will consider how dependent we are on God for our existence, for our faculties, and for our acts.
 1. *Our existence.* We did not create ourselves and we are unable of ourselves to conserve our existence. What an injustice, therefore, it would be to glory in ourselves!
 2. *Our faculties.* Doubtless the intellect and the free-will of man are among the greatest of God's works. Yet how limited is our *intellect*, Without God's revelation how meager and how false would have been our comprehension of the most vital truths! And in the realm of natural science, how many mysteries remain still unsolved! Within our own selves are obscure and impenetrable secrets.

How weak is our *will*, Concupiscence from within and temptations from without ever urge us to sin. And we know that without God's grace we would fall even more often than we do.

3. *Our acts.* What use have we made of our mind, our will, our bodily powers? A glance at our past will reveal how frequently it has been blackened by sin. The recollection of such abuse and profanation of the gifts of God should fill our soul with deep and sincere humility.

III. We will try to realize that nothing short of God's grace can effectively dispose our soul to practical sentiments of humility. We rebel against humiliation and obscurity. Our Savior taught his disciples to practice humility and, by his example, showed its true worth. We will ask God through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, to give us a grateful appreciation that whatever we have is the gift of his generous bounty.

When tempted to sins of pride or vanity we will recall some of the reasons we have for humbling ourselves.

He made us, and not we ourselves.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore the Word made flesh, giving us by his incarnation the most perfect example of humility. How great were his glory, his power, his divine perfections, *who*, as St. Paul says, *being in the form of God, thought it not*

*robbery to be equal with God.*¹ He descended from the heights of his glory, abdicating, as it were, his divine dignity and prerogatives, became man, and dwelt among us. He *emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.*² The incarnation was par excellence a mystery of humility.

And the Son of God, in the abundance of his love, practiced humility in all the circumstances of his life on earth. Born in poverty, with a stable for shelter and its manger for a cradle, he spent thirty years in humble submission to Mary and Joseph.

During his public life, even though he performed great miracles to establish and confirm his mission, he continued to give striking examples of humility. With perfect truthfulness he could say to his disciples: *I am meek and humble of heart.*³

Let us thank our divine Master for teaching us humility by the example of his entire life, for drawing us to him by his meekness and lowliness of heart. Can we fail to love our

¹ PHILIP. 2⁶

² PHILIP. 2⁷

³ MATTH. 11²⁹

God, who humbles himself so completely out of love for us? Let us recognize in our humble Savior the model that we should imitate. Says St. Bernard: *Thus did the God of majesty confine himself, thus did he humble himself, thus did he empty himself of his glory, that you also should do likewise.*¹

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Humility consists in having a true appreciation of ourselves, neither underestimating our worth and ability nor yet exaggerating it and taking to ourselves that credit for our excellence which rightly belongs to God. That we may better understand the nature of humility, we may consider how dependent we are on God both for our existence, for our faculties and for their exercise.

1. *Our existence.* What is this being which distinguishes us from nothingness, this body which lives and moves, this soul which rules it and which is the better part of ourselves, what are they all that we should glory in them? We did not make them. A few years ago we were just nothing at all, and then, not by our

¹ *Serm. in nat. Dom.*

energy, but by a free act of divine power, were we created. This existence, therefore, is not our work; it is the work of God who could take it from us as easily as he gave it to us and could make us return to the nothingness from which we came.

We should no more credit ourselves with our existence than a piece of human art should pride itself on its excellence. The latter, moreover, once produced, will continue to exist regardless of the artist who made it, while we are dependent upon the divine Creator for every moment of our existence. Our very being does not belong to us; it is in fact loaned to us, it is an act of the bounty of God who alone remains its Master. What an injustice, therefore, or rather what a folly it would be for us to glory in ourselves! The appreciation of this truth should lead us to reject every thought of pride and vain-glory, every desire to become more prominent, and to keep us in the sense of the deepest humility.

2. *Our faculties.* Doubtless the intellect and the free-will of a man are among the greatest of God's works. They are the noblest reflection of his divine perfections that we see in the world, raising man above the brute cre-

ation and bringing him into relation with the spiritual world, into union with God. Yet alongside this greatness what limitations, beside this power what feebleness!

Our intellect is, indeed, a precious gift, raising us above the brute creation; by it we seek to acquire truth. If by its aid a few rays of light reach us, is it not likewise true that it is surrounded by deep, impenetrable shadows which it is powerless to dispel? How much do we really know? Or rather how little? If some philosophers, discouraged at the sight of countless problems that we are unable to solve, have declared that human reason is unable to acquire any certain truths, doubtless they have fallen into serious error. But does not this error of theirs bear witness at least to the imperfection and narrow limitation of the human intellect? Is not our knowledge shrouded in mystery, uncertainty, vagueness?

Without the help of God's revelation how meager and how false would have been our comprehension of the most vital truths of life, such as the nature of God and the laws that should govern our relations with him! Left to ourselves, we would have remained ignor-

ant of the most sublime truths now matter of common knowledge.

In the realm of natural science man's intellect has been eagerly searching for truth. Yet how many mysteries of nature remain still unsolved! One of the most striking tendencies of the modern scientific spirit is to insist upon the limitations of its own conclusions. We see the confident belief of yesterday replaced by a different conviction to-day which in turn may be discarded to-morrow.

Our knowledge, therefore, of the world above and of the material world about us is indeed very meagre and affords little justification for pride of intellect. But do we not find, in very truth, most obscure mysteries within our own selves? The nature of soul and body, the laws governing them, the unexplained bonds that join them and subordinate one to the other, are as impenetrable secrets hidden from our keenest observation.

Besides his intellect, man's noblest endowment is his *free will*. And yet how weak! We do not need the testimony of philosophers nor of scientists to convince us of the feebleness of the will; our own experience serves to recall it. The concupiscence of our fallen

nature from within and temptations from without ever urge us to sin. And in the light of faith we also know that, unless the grace of God helped us by strengthening our will, we would fall yet more often.

The flower in the field, swayed to and fro by the wind fittingly typifies the uncertainty and weakness of our will when not strengthened by God's grace. And when we consider our relation to the world of creatures in whose midst we live, again we are humbled. For instead of ruling over nature, we really find ourselves the slaves and, as it were, victims of its laws. Only by mighty effort and unremitting, constant toil, can we make it help us in our needs; only by ceaseless watchfulness can we escape the hourly dangers with which it threatens us, and fortify ourselves against the fatal influences that it exerts upon us. In short, life is at all possible only on condition of a perpetual struggle against the threatening forces of nature.

3. *Our acts.* What use have we made of our mind, our will, our bodily powers? All were intended by God to help in our sanctification, to aid us in the practice of virtue. But what have we actually done? Let us examine.

When we glance, even superficially, over our life, we are struck by the number of sins into which we have been led by human weakness. As far back in our past as we can examine we see the mark of sin; when we were not yet men, we were already sinners.

And since then, how many sins of negligence and voluntary omission, of irreverence in holy places, indifference towards God whom we should love above all things? How often have we failed in our duty to our brethren; by thoughts and words of contempt, resentment, hatred, revenge, envy, detraction, anger? How many times have we committed sins of pride, over-sensitiveness, self-indulgence, sensuality, inordinate attachment? The recollection of such abuse and profanation of the gifts of God should fill our soul with deep and sincere humility in his holy presence. We can, it is true, discover some virtuous acts in the midst of these sins. But how many even of these are marred by imperfections in the intention or the manner in which they were performed?

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, to arouse in myself a profound sense of humility, it should suffice for me to perceive that my entire being, all my faculties are thy free gift, and that in their exercise I need the help of thy grace to keep me from sin. But nothing short of thy grace can effectively dispose my soul to practical sentiments of humility. Our unassisted nature rebels against humiliation and obscurity.

It is indeed true that the more insignificant we really are the more do we wish to appear great; the more that our worth is the free gift of another, the more do we try to gain credit for ourselves. We greatly dislike pride in others, but are we not inclined to excuse it in ourselves, nay even to cherish it, to call it by milder names, to give it our approval?

Thou, my Savior, didst repeatedly teach thy disciples to practice humility; and by thy example thou didst show us its excellence and its true worth. We beg of thee to grant us those helps without which we will never be truly humble. Make us form a true, unexaggerated estimate of our worth and capabilities, and a grateful appreciation that whatever we

have is the gift of thy generous bounty. Remove from us everything that will arouse pride and conceit in our hearts.

We ask this grace though the intercession of the Blessed Virgin who, though the most exalted, was yet the humblest of God's creatures.

When tempted to sins of pride or vanity, I will recall some of the reasons I have for humbling myself.

He made us, and not we ourselves.¹

¹ Ps. 99³

XXII

ADVANTAGES OF HUMILITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Lord teaching us that *he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.* In Christ we see the perfect fulfillment of this promise. The humiliations of his mortal life are now rewarded with eternal glory. Most of the saints, now enjoying the blessedness of heaven, led simple obscure lives, sometimes despised and even persecuted.
- II. Among the many advantages that result from the practice of humility, we will consider three.
 1. *It makes us worthy of God's love.* We find this truth frequently repeated in Holy Writ. Since God's greater glory is the end to be attained by this world of creatures, it is reasonable for him to bestow his choicest gifts upon the meek and humble of heart. For the humble, regarding all that they are and all that they possess as God's free gift, seek thereby to give greater glory to him.
 2. *It gains the favor of men.* It is desirable even as a social virtue. For the company of the humble and unpretentious is more agreeable than that of the proud and egotistic. In the absence of

humility, we generally find conceit, ambition, vanity, or jealousy: all these both offend God and displease our fellow-men. But humility has the hearty good will of all; it receives that sympathy and encouragement which is refused to pride.

3. *It gives peace to our soul.* Without humility a soul will constantly be disturbed and disquieted. It is annoyed by a longing for honors, by a dread of humiliation, by failures, by little injuries to its self-love. But humility frees it from these causes of anxiety, from the ephemeral joy of prosperity, as well as from despondency.

III. Some there are who despise humility and regard it as unworthy of their efforts. We will ask ourselves whether we have seriously begun to acquire this virtue so strongly recommended by our Lord and all holy men. We will ask for the grace to foster humility in our hearts.

We will resolve:

1. To stifle every internal movement of self-love;
2. To accept willingly whatever humiliations divine Providence may send to us.

Non reputes te aliquid profecisse, nisi omnibus inferiorem te esse sentias.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord Jesus Christ teaching us that *every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be*

*exalted.*¹ By these words he would point out to us that humility in this life will be rewarded by glory hereafter.

In Christ himself we see the perfect fulfilment of this promise; for the humiliations of his mortal life which he endured voluntarily and without complaint are now rewarded with eternal glory. *He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names.*²

The saints now in the possession of everlasting blessedness, now exalted and glorified like their divine Master, while on earth lived humbly, even those few who rose to exalted position. Most of them led simple, obscure lives, unnoticed, almost unknown, sometimes despised and even persecuted. The same reward of eternal glory may be ours if we likewise humble ourselves. Says the inspired word: *Be humble in the sight of the Lord, and he will exalt you.*³

¹ LUKE 14¹

² PHILIP. 2⁸⁻⁹

³ JAMES 4¹⁰

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Among the many advantages that result from the practice of humility, let us consider these three: it makes us worthy of God's love; it gains the favor of men; it brings great peace to our soul.

1. *Humility makes us worthy of God's love.* This truth is frequently repeated in the sacred Scriptures. *Humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God.*¹ In the first Epistle of St. Peter we read that *God resisteth the proud, but to the humble he giveth grace.*² Such is the invariable teaching of all masters of the spiritual life. In the *Imitation* we read that "the humble man God protecteth and delivereth; the humble he loveth and consol-
eth; to the humble he inclineth himself; on the humble he bestoweth bounteous grace, and after he hath been brought low, raiseth him up unto glory. To the humble he revealeth his secrets, and sweetly inviteth and draweth him unto himself."³

That God should shower his choicest gifts

¹ ECCLUS. 3²⁰

² I PETER 5⁵

³ IMIT. II, 2²

upon the meek and humble of heart is quite reasonable. If his greater glory is the end to be attained by this world of creatures, should we not seek his praise and glory in all things? But the proud man, assuming credit and honor for the very gifts that God has bestowed upon him, takes unto himself the glory of God's work. The humble soul, however, forgetful of self, regarding all that it is and all that it possesses as the free gift of God's bounty, seeks thereby to give greater honor to him; and God loves that soul. The more it strips itself of glory, the more God enriches it; the more it acknowledges its dependence on him, the more he helps it.

2. *Humility gains the favor of men.* Our every-day experience convinces us that humility is quite desirable as a social virtue. We find the company of the humble and unpretentious more desirable than that of the proud and egotistic. How quickly we are bored by a conceited, self-centered man! The reasons are not hard to find.

In the first place, let us consider the qualities opposed to humility. Prominent among these we see conceit, which is ever conscious of its own excellence and always prefers self to

others: ambition, which seeks preferment and honors; vanity, solicitous for the praises of a flattering world; jealousy and envy, which are aroused by the success of others: all these both offend God and displease our fellow-men. If we let such dispositions grow upon us, they will blight the affection and esteem with which others may regard us.

On the other hand, humility, self-forgetful, unpretentious, cordially appreciative, avoiding praise and disclaiming credit, has the hearty good will of all. It is natural for us to extend to the humble man that sympathy and encouragement which we refuse to the proud. Is not the practice of humility a great help in promoting amiable and peaceful relations among men? For what is frequently the cause of dissension, strife, hatred? Is it not an over-sensitive self-love, that takes offense upon slight provocation, that finds forgiveness too humiliating, that appeals to its rights and prerogatives, that is haughty, vindictive, finding submission or contradiction intolerable, that holds obstinately to its opinions and bears ill-will towards those who dare to differ?

Let us substitute humility for self-love, and hollow pretensions disappear, mildness takes

the place of violence, forgiveness replaces relentlessness. *Where humility reigns*, said one of the saints, *there is peace, tranquillity, serenity.*¹ St. Augustine tells us: *Ubi humilitas ibi charitas.*

3. *Humility gives peace to our own soul.* Any soul that fails to practice humility will constantly be disturbed and disquieted. The longing for honors and esteem keeps annoying it, and the ceaseless dread of any humiliation gives it no rest. A little failure, an injury to its self-love, or a little sign of contempt dejects it and grieves it for a long time. Obscurity weighs it down, envy devours its happiness, the success of a more fortunate rival pains it.

But the practice of humility frees a soul from these causes of disturbance. Such a soul regards not the flattery of men but the judgment of God, and therefore accepts humiliation without a murmur. *It is not the prey of anxiety, says St. John Chrysostom, is not roused to anger, is not tormented by desire for glory, is not enslaved by envy.*²

The peace that springs from humility is the most desirable thing that we can look for.

¹ ST. EUSEBIUS, *Homilia septima, ad Monachos.*

² *Hom. 66*

It frees us from both the ephemeral joy of prosperity and the despair resulting from adversity. Humility is true wisdom, a most precious virtue, compared with which earthly treasures are worthless.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

There are some souls who, moved by God's grace, have appreciated the great worth of humility. But there are many others who view spiritual things through the deceiving and distorting prism of the senses and the passions; they have come to despise this holy virtue and to regard it as unworthy of their efforts.

Like these latter have I sometimes blinded myself to the advantages of humility? Has my admiration of it in others led me to cultivate it in myself? The Gospel recommends it, our blessed Lord gave us a life-long example of it, all the saints have faithfully practiced it, and spiritual teachers all agree in considering it the very foundation of all true perfection. How have I profited by these teachings? How have I imitated those models that are well known to me? Surely I have not attained to any high degree of humility. Have I even begun

seriously to acquire it? Am I struggling against self-love, or am I letting its roots sink deeper and deeper into my heart? Am I eager to appear important before others, to display my talents, to have myself praised and applauded?

Thou, my Creator, dost ask me to learn humility. By thy grace I will foster this virtue in my heart. Turn my regard from vanity and self-conceit and, in accordance with thy desire, make me appreciate the value of humility.

I resolve:

1. To stifle every internal movement of self-love;
2. To accept willingly whatever humiliations divine Providence may send to me.

Non reputes te aliquid profecisse, nisi omnibus inferiorem te esse sentias.¹

¹ IMIT. II, 2²

XXIII

THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Lord teaching us by word and example how we should practice humility. We should become as little children.
- II. We will reflect upon our obligation to practice humility in thoughts, words, and acts.

1. *Thoughts.* Humility can not be truly a virtue unless rooted in the depths of our heart. Otherwise it is insincere, like the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. There are three degrees of interior humility: we should despise ourselves, bear in mind our dependence on God; we should not strive for human praise, to be seen and honored by men; we should willingly accept humiliation.

2. *Words.* Genuine humility is sure to manifest itself in our speech; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. Humility requires that we refrain from pronouncing our own praise and that we speak of ourselves as little as possible.

3. *Acts.* Our deeds often reveal our thoughts and sentiments more undisguisedly than do our words. A humble man is so exteriorly. His manners are modest; simplicity pervades all the

details of his life. St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul are admirable examples for us to imitate.

III. We will examine our own dispositions and habits to see how we are practicing this holy virtue of humility. Are we humble of heart? Are we not gratified by the praise and flattery that we receive? Do we not continually talk of ourselves and about our concerns? Does humility govern our outward acts? We will confess that we are far from possessing this virtue, the necessary foundation of true perfection; and we will ask our Lord to implant it firmly in our soul, to destroy our vanity, to crush our pride.

We will resolve:

1. By guarding our thoughts, our words, and our acts, to eliminate whatever is opposed to Christian humility;
2. Whenever in vanity we voice our own praises, to impose some little appropriate penance on ourselves.

Love to be unknown and to be accounted as nothing.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our blessed Lord, who by word of mouth and by the example of his life taught us how we should practice humility. When his disciples, still influenced by purely human ambition, were discussing the question of preferment and asked the Master: *Who*

*thinkest thou is the greater in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus calling unto him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.*¹

The humble and submissive little child, without pretension to consideration and esteem, forgetful of self, willing to be forgotten by others, free from the anxieties of self-love, conscious of its own weakness and inferiority, such is the model which the Christian should keep in mind if he would be a disciple of Jesus and share in his heavenly kingdom. To be Christians we must resemble in our interior and exterior life little children, dismissing all haughtiness and pride.

We marvel at the humble, child-like simplicity of the saints. They have understood Christ's recommendation and have practiced it during life. Let us likewise take to heart the lesson which our Lord gave to his contentious disciples.

¹ MATTH. 18¹⁻⁴

II. CONSIDERATIONS

We should practice humility in thoughts, words and acts.

1. *Thoughts.* Humility can not be truly a virtue, can not be genuine unless it is rooted in the very depths of our heart. It must inspire and direct our most secret thoughts and dispositions. Otherwise it is insincere, resembling the hypocritical pretensions of the Pharisees whose virtuous practices were merely external.

We may consider three degrees of interior humility. In the first place we should despise ourselves bearing in mind *our dependence upon God* and the futility of our unaided efforts. To him we owe our existence and all our faculties. Whatever is most excellent in our character, whatever is most successful in our endeavors, is primarily the work of his grace and of his fatherly care. Let us confess our own littleness and weakness. *Nihil sum, nihil possum, nihil valeo, nihil habeo.*

The second degree of interior humility consists in the *indifference with which we should regard the esteem and praises of men.* We ought never to labor for the sake of human

praise, to be seen and honored by men. It is an unfortunate weakness of human nature to desire flattery, to strive that others should have a most favorable idea of our talents, our piety, our virtues, even that their opinion of us should be much better than we deserve. But with God's grace we can conquer this human inclination. A soul well established in the practice of humility does not regard human flattery and whenever it is praised it interiorly pays homage to God for whatever seems most worthy in itself.

In the third place we have a still more lofty and difficult practice of humility. A soul that has attained to this degree of perfection *willingly accepts humiliation*, considering it the very guardian, as it were, of humility itself. Self-love recoils from humiliations and whenever it is unavoidably obliged to undergo any, it is pained and troubled exceedingly. But a humble soul accepts them with undisturbed peace of mind, seeing that they come from God. It imitates the example of the holy apostles, *rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.*¹

2. Words. Humility, if deeply rooted in our soul, is sure to manifest itself in our speech; for *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*¹ The words of a proud man are full of ostentation and conceit; those of the humble are reserved and modest.

Humility requires that we refrain from pronouncing our own praise; whether directly, by displaying our good qualities or our external advantages which men admire, such as our position in life, our wealth, honors; or indirectly in our conversation talking of ourselves so as to bring out our good qualities, ability, or virtues.

Christian humility aims still higher than this. It obliges us to speak of ourselves as little as possible. There are other ways of manifesting egotistic self-love besides those we have just considered, ways less revolting but equally opposed to humility. Thus, instead of praising ourselves, we may speak of our concerns, our occupations, studies, manner of life. We may even provoke the praise of others by the excessive avowals of our unworthiness. But a humble man speaks of

¹ LUKE 6⁴⁵

himself, save in matters quite indifferent, as seldom as possible.

3. *Acts.* Our deeds have a language that reveals our thoughts and sentiments often more undisguisedly and more sincerely than do our words. True humility, residing in the soul, will be expressed by external acts.

Pride and vanity betray their presence by our whole outward bearing: in our gestures, in the expression of our features, by a glance of the eye, the tone of the voice. A vain man is excessively particular, even to affectation, in his dress and manner. But one who is truly humble is so exteriorly. His deportment, his manners are modest; in short, simplicity pervades all the details of his life.

We would do well to reflect upon and imitate the admirable example of St. Francis de Sales and St. Vincent de Paul. The former, though of noble origin, ever maintained a plain and simple exterior that reflected his lowliness of heart. St. Vincent de Paul, instead of seeking applause and fame for the success of his marvelous enterprises, only tried the more to remain hidden and obscure. His dress, always clean and decent, was never rich or elegant, his manner was gentlemanly

but never affected. Let us try to be both interiorly and exteriorly humble like these saints. Let there be no arrogance, no vanity, no self-love in our manner: but let us pattern our lives after the most striking example of humility in all history, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though the incarnate Son of God, willed to veil his grandeur and to appear in the world with the external bearings of lowness and obscurity.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Let us examine our own dispositions and habits to see how we are practicing this holy virtue of humility. Are we humble of heart? Do we sincerely confess to ourselves the weakness of our nature and our dependence on almighty God? On the contrary, do we not take pride in our talents, in our physical superiority, in the qualities of mind that we think to perceive in ourselves? Are we not gratified by the praise and flattery that we receive, and do we not resent the disclosure of our imperfections?

In our speech are we humble? Do we not continually talk of ourselves and about our

concerns, even though we thus weary those who must listen? Is there not a secret satisfaction in recounting what redounds to our credit.

Does humility govern our outward acts? Do we practice modesty and simplicity at all times? Do we not strive to attract favorable notice by our manner and bearing? In our conduct is there any sign of pretension or vanity?

My God, in at least some of these ways I have violated the obligations of Christian humility. I am far from possessing this virtue, the necessary foundation of true perfection. It is not enough, dear Lord, to teach me the value of humility and to show me how deficient I am in practicing it; to implant it in my soul must be the work of thy grace. Do thou destroy my vanity, crush my pride. *O Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.*

I resolve:

1. By guarding my thoughts, my words, and my acts, to eliminate whatever is opposed to Christian humility;
2. Whenever in vanity I voice my own

praises, to impose some little appropriate penance on myself.

Love to be unknown and to be accounted as nothing.¹

¹ IMIT. I, 2²

XXIV

SINS AGAINST HUMILITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God in his hatred for the sins opposed to humility. The rebellious angels were cast from heaven because of their pride. We will notice our Lord's vehemence in denouncing the haughty pride of the Pharisees.
- II. The sins against humility are principally pride, ambition and vanity. We will try to understand their nature and to appreciate their evil.
 1. *Pride* is the inordinate satisfaction and complacency which a man takes in himself and his own excellence. The proud see only their good qualities, which, indeed, they even exaggerate. They are full of presumption and self-confidence, expecting every one else to admire their fine qualities, whether real or imaginary, attributing to themselves all the merit of their good acts. They are generally obstinate and self-opinionated.
 2. *Ambition* is an inordinate love of honors. It makes a person dissatisfied with his present position, giving him no peace until he attains to higher honors, which in turn only add more fuel to his inordinate longings. Its influence is felt

in all ranks of society. Even in religious communities we see its pernicious influence the cause of rivalry and unseemly competition.

3. *Vanity* is an inordinate desire for the esteem of men. It is not forbidden to value the good opinion of our fellows and to try to deserve it. But the end toward which we strive should not be to win the applause of men; in all things we should seek to please God by fulfilling his divine will. Ordinarily the vain man takes pride in advantages for which he has no right to assume credit to himself.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we are subject to any of these sins against humility. Have we formed too favorable an idea of our wisdom, piety, and virtue? Have we cherished ambition in our heart, yielding to sentiments of jealousy or ill-will? Have we tried to please men rather than God? We will ask Christ to implant in our soul a sense of our unworthiness, to remove all personal ambition, to make us disregard human glory and seek only his good pleasure.

We will resolve:

1. To suppress every thought of pride, ambition, and vanity;
2. To accept without complaint what humiliations God may permit.

Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God in his hatred for the sins opposed to humility. He exalts the lowly of heart, but, says Holy Writ, *every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled.*¹ God gives grace to the humble but the proud he resists.

The rebellious angels because of their pride, were cast from heaven to the abyss of hell. Indeed Holy Scripture abounds in threats of the severe punishment that will be meted out to those who follow the sad example of the fallen angels. *The day of the Lord of hosts,* says the prophet, *shall be upon everyone that is proud and highminded, and upon everyone that is arrogant, and he shall be humbled.*²

Our blessed Lord, so gentle and kind toward sinners, seems to put aside his mercy in the presence of pride. Let us notice his vehemence in denouncing the haughtiness of the Pharisees who proudly boasted of their pretended righteousness and thought themselves superior to other men. Our Savior anathematizes them; he compares them to whitened sepulchres whose beautiful exterior conceals

¹ LUKE 14¹¹

² Is. 2¹²

the corruption within; he declares that their best works, having for their end human glory and not the desire to please God, will receive their whole reward in this life. *When thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men.*

. . . *When ye pray, you shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. . . . And when you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward.*¹

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The sins against the virtue of humility are principally pride, ambition, and vanity. Let us try to understand the nature of these vices and to appreciate their evil.

1. *Pride* is the inordinate satisfaction and complacency which a man takes in himself and his own excellence. It is a sort of self-worship

¹ MATTH. 6²⁻¹⁶

wherein the proud both worship and are worshipped.

The humble, far from assuming to themselves undeserved merit, turn their attention to the rectifying of their defects. The proud, on the other hand, forgetting their faults, see only their good qualities which they also exaggerate, taking credit for much which they do not possess.

The humble man, conscious of his own unworthiness, is diffident of himself and of his capabilities. But the proud man is full of presumption and self-confidence; he thinks himself capable of anything; he has a great admiration for himself and is elated over his excellence, which exists only in his own fancy.

The humble man does not seek the applause and praise of men, he seeks to evade honors and is well pleased with obscurity. But the proud man, infatuated with his fine qualities, whether real or imaginary, expects every one else to admire him also. He thinks that he is never esteemed too highly and feels that they treat him unjustly who refuse him marked deference.

The humble man, as he knows that God is the author of all good and that to him we owe whatever we have of nature and of grace,

always attributes to God whatever good he finds in himself. Nor does he exalt himself above his fellows, but rejoices to see about him others more worthy than himself. The proud man attributes to himself all the merit of his good acts, seeing therein only the fruit of his own efforts and taking no account of the action of grace. And he will be second to none; or at least when obliged to confess another's superiority, he does so with reluctance and jealousy.

The humble man, distrustful of his own independent ability, is ready to heed good advice and experiences no repugnance when sacrificing his own will in obedience to the lawful commands of his superiors. But the proud man is obstinate and self-opinionated, accepting no one's advice and taking correction with an ill-will. Obedience he regards as a disagreeable burden and practices it only when unavoidably constrained to do so.

2. *Ambition*, according to the angelic doctor, is an inordinate love of honors and dignities. We must not confuse this with the praiseworthy desire to develop one's talents and improve one's powers for the sake of God's kingdom. The vice of ambition makes a

person dissatisfied with his present position, giving him no peace until he attains to higher honors and more distinguished position, which in turn only add more fuel to the fire of his inordinate longings. St. Bernard calls this insatiable pursuit of honors the cross of the ambitious, torturing its victims yet ever enticing them.

In all ranks of society the influence of ambition is felt. It rules in the councils of the mighty ones of earth where the thirst for power is often the predominating factor of human politics. It is to be found also in the most humble conditions, even in places where we might suppose it could have no access. In religious communities we see its pernicious influence the cause of rivalries and unseemly competition. However insignificant the honors to be given, however modest the dignity attached thereto, however unpretentious the positions to be filled, ambition will exalt them. It eagerly seeks a place more elevated and esteemed, though ever so slightly.

The history of the Church as well as everyday experience shows that even the clergy are not always free from this vice. Regardless of their promise to renounce the world and its

advantages and to take Christ as the portion of their inheritance, we sometimes find them over-desirous of distinctions and honors.

3. *Vanity* is an inordinate desire for the esteem of men. It is not forbidden to value the good opinion of our fellows and to try to deserve it. In fact we are admonished by Holy Writ to take care of a good name. The Christian who, by faithfulness to duty, merits the good opinion of his neighbor does not perform his duty to gain this esteem. The end toward which he strives is not to win the approbation of men and their applause but to please God by fulfilling his divine will. If we must sometimes take account of the esteem with which others regard us, it is not as something desirable in itself but only for the edification of our neighbor or because our good reputation is necessary for the proper fulfillment of our obligations.

Ordinarily the vain man takes pride in advantages for which he has no right to assume credit to himself; they may be natural gifts that he has not acquired by his own efforts and which he possesses without any desert on his part; often they are external qualities which are of no value in the eyes of thoughtful persons.

St. Thomas has well said that the human glory so much sought after by man is vain: because of its object, for when not quite unreal it is at best frail and uncertain; because of the men from whom the flattering praise is expected, for their opinion is often unreliable; because it is not in conformity with the true end of our existence, namely the glory of God and the salvation of our souls.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, it is easy to understand the evil of these sins against humility. I may have frequently blamed them in others. But perhaps I am more subject to them myself than I think. Do I evince signs of pride and conceit which the lack of thorough self-examination has heretofore prevented me from seeing? Have I formed too favorable an idea of my wisdom, piety, and virtue, exalting myself in my own opinion above others? Do I presume to reject prudent advice, to hold with unreasonable obstinacy to my own notions?

Have I cherished ambition in my heart? When some one else has been selected for an undertaking or to receive some honor, have I yielded to sentiments of jealousy or ill-will?

Have I passed censorious criticism in an unchristian spirit?

Am I altogether free from vanity? Have I tried to please men rather than God? Has the desire of winning approval been the secret motive of some of my acts? Is it the first that occurs to my mind when I am about to perform some public action? For the flattery of applause do I overcome difficulties with greater energy than I would put forth for the simple glory of God?

My Jesus, meek and humble of heart, by thy grace destroy these dispositions in my heart, remove these obstacles to the practice of humility. Implant in my soul a sense of my own unworthiness; and drive from it all personal ambition; make me disregard human glory and seek only thy good pleasure.

I resolve:

1. To suppress every thought of pride, ambition, and vanity;
2. To accept without complaint what humiliations God may permit.

Every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled.¹

¹ LUKE 14¹¹

XXV

HUMILITY IN A PRIEST

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Lord inspiring his Church to direct her priests to make repeated acts of humility during the sacrifice of the mass. We will recall especially the *Confiteor*, the *Kyrie*, the *Domine non sum dignus* and other professions of humility which the priest makes during the mass.
- II. That we may understand the priest's obligation to practice humility, we will consider his dignity, the functions of his ministry, and the special evil of pride in a priest.
 1. *The dignity of the priesthood.* The word of God teaches that the greater we are the more we must humble ourselves in all things. As the priest surpasses other men in dignity, he should likewise surpass them in humility.
 2. *The nature of the functions of the ministry.* The priest is very much before men. He is therefore especially exposed to the temptation of seeking praise and applause. His priestly functions tend to flatter his self-love. The confessional, the pulpit, the altar—any of these may beget in him a spirit of pride.

3. *The special evil of pride in a priest.* How wrong it is for a priest, who should devote all his energies to God's greater glory, to procure for himself the honor that belongs to God! Such a priest, to accomplish his selfish purpose, uses the very functions which his priesthood gives him a right to exercise.

III. If we would practice humility in the priesthood, we should try to become more and more humble during our years in the seminary. We will ask ourselves whether we have made the acquisition of this virtue an object of serious effort. We will ask Christ to help us overcome our inclinations to pride and vanity.

We will resolve:

1. From time to time to recall the grandeur and holiness of the priesthood and our own unworthiness of such a vocation;

2. When fulfilling or assisting at the sacred functions of the ministry, to bear with us great purity of intention.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our blessed Lord who inspires his Church to direct her priests to make repeated acts of humility during the mass. Before offering the holy sacrifice, the priest, in the attitude of a penitent, must confess

publicly that he is a sinner and ask those assisting to pray for him.

When he ascends the altar, more and more conscious of his unworthiness, he begs God to blot out his sins; and to obtain pardon he has recourse to the intercession of the saints whose relics have been placed in the altar-stone: *Aufer a nobis, quæsumus, Domine, iniurias nostras. . . . Oramus te, Domine, per merita sanctorum tuorum quorum reliquiae hic sunt, et omnium sanctorum ut indulgere digneris omnia peccata mea.*

Immediately after the introit the priest again implores the divine mercy, repeating the petition nine times, in the *Kyrie eleison*.

He recalls his unworthiness when offering to God the bread that is about to be consecrated. *Suscipe, sancte Pater omnipotens æterne Deus, hanc immaculatam hostiam quam ego indignus famulus tuus offero tibi.* And he adds that it is for the expiation of his countless sins. *Pro innumerabilibus peccatis et offenditionibus et negligentiis meis.* Later, after the offertory of the chalice, he says: *In spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito, suscipiamur a te, Domine.*

Before his communion he strikes his breast three times while he repeats the centurion's act of humility: *Domine, non sum dignus.*

Thus would the Church have the priest learn that, while he should possess a lively faith, a deep spirit of religion, a fervent love, an angelic purity, he must also practice the virtue of humility in an eminent degree.

Let us thank the holy Spirit for this teaching. Let us ask that we understand it more and more perfectly, and especially that he inspire us to put it into practice.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Every Christian who wishes to live according to the law of Jesus Christ must practice humility. But this obligation is imposed even more rigorously on the priest. We may better appreciate this truth by considering his dignity, the functions of his ministry, and the special evil of pride in a priest.

1. *The dignity of the priesthood.* We read in Holy Writ: *the greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things.*¹ Among men there is no greater dignity than that of the priest. United to Christ and associated with him, the Supreme Pontiff of the New Law,

¹ ECCLUS. 3²⁰

marked with a character that raises him above the angels, he exercises the most divine powers given to man. As he surpasses other men in dignity, he should likewise surpass them in humility.

The Blessed Virgin, chosen by God to be the mother of his Son, our Lord and Savior, though elevated to so high a glory, yet, far from being given to pride, was a model of humility. *God, she said, looked upon the lowness of his hand-maid.*¹ Such is the sentiment of humility which should enter the heart of the priest at the thought of his prerogatives.

Whatever may be his natural gifts and those with which grace has adorned him, a man has no right of his own to enter the holy priesthood; he must acknowledge that he is unworthy. *You have not chosen me: but I have chosen you.*² And when he is raised to this high office, he must humbly confess that it is entirely due to the mercy and goodness of God. *De stercore erigens pauperem, ut collocet cum cum principibus, cum principibus populi sui.*³ The pre-

¹ LUKE 1⁴⁸

² JOHN 15¹⁸

³ Ps. 112⁷⁻⁻⁸

eminence of his position should not stir up in him any proud pretensions or self-love, but rather it should cause him to repel more vigorously every suggestion of pride and vanity.

2. *The nature of the functions of the ministry.* The life of a priest is not passed within the walls of a monastery, far from the eyes of the world. He is, on the contrary, very much before men. *You are the light of the world.* . . . *Let your light shine before men.*¹ He is therefore especially exposed to the temptation of seeking the praise and applause of men.

His danger of yielding to vain conceit is especially great since his priestly functions tend particularly to flatter his self-love. The ministry of the confessional, where the priest becomes the object of exceptional confidence on the part of the faithful; the pulpit, where he preaches the word of God, where, if God has bestowed on him the gift of eloquence, he holds the wrapt attention of his hearers; the altar, where he offers the holy sacrifice of the mass; the other ceremonies of the Church, in which he is the representative of Jesus Christ: any of these may beget in him a spirit of pride.

¹ MATTH. 5¹⁴⁻¹⁶

How often priests are in danger of yielding to temptations of pride and vanity. The object of respect, admiration, and confidence, how easily their heart is opened to the baneful influence of this subtle passion against which the holiest souls have sometimes great difficulty in defending themselves.

3. *The special evil of pride in a priest.* It is always wrong to procure for one's self the glory that belongs to God. But how much greater is it in a priest, whose mission on earth is to devote all his energies to God's greater glory and the interests of his heavenly kingdom? Such was the principal end of the Incarnation; and the priesthood, by which the mission of Christ is continued in the world should have no other. The priest is a priest, therefore, only to glorify God, that is to make him known, loved, honored, to make his divine will reign in the souls of men, to combat sin by which he is offended and dishonored. The priest does not act in his own name but in the name of Jesus Christ, whose minister and ambassador he is. It is a noble and beautiful mission, the loftiest privilege that can be granted to man. How much greater in the priest therefore than in another must be the

sin of pride: for him to be occupied with his own rather than with God's glory. Instead of striving to establish and spread God's kingdom, he uses his high office to satisfy his own vanity and ambition.

What adds to the evil of pride in a priest is the fact that, to accomplish his selfish purpose, he generally uses the sacred functions which his priesthood gives him a right to exercise. He ascends the pulpit and, instead of preaching the message of life and salvation which he is commissioned to preach, instead of instilling the love and fear of God into the hearts of the faithful, he ministers to his own reputation. The altar, the tribunal of penance, the venerable liturgy of the Church, all serve his vanity. The value which he attaches to the sacred functions of his priesthood depends upon the credit and honor which they procure for him.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Jesus Christ, the great high priest of the New Law, was meek and humble of heart. After his example, all holy priests have faithfully practiced humility; and God has blessed

their work. *He giveth grace to the humble.*¹ What priest was more humble than St. Vincent de Paul? And what priest ever accomplished greater work? If, then, I wish to be a priest according to the sacred heart of my divine Master, a priest truly powerful in word and works, I must earnestly strive to acquire humility.

Now, the virtue of humility needs to be deeply rooted in the soul, assiduously cultivated, and carefully guarded. In order that I may be a humble priest, I should try to become more and more humble during my years in the seminary. Have I made the acquisition of this virtue an object of serious effort? Have I turned my attention to it at my prayers, my examination of conscience, my visits to the Blessed Sacrament? Have I taken advantage of every opportunity to practice humility, accepting cheerfully whatever humiliations God sends me, refusing to let my successes, my talents, my good qualities minister to my self-love, sincerely serving only God's honor and glory? Jesus, meek and humble of heart, divine model of the virtues

¹ JAMES 4:6

that should adorn a priest, make my heart like unto thine, help me to overcome my inclinations to pride and vanity.

I resolve:

1. From time to time to recall the grandeur and holiness of the priesthood and my own unworthiness of such a vocation;
2. When fulfilling or assisting at the sacred functions of the ministry, to bear with me great purity of intention, rejecting every thought of vanity which they might occasion.

Jesus, meek and humble of heart, make my heart like unto thine.

XXVI

PENANCE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God's rigorous justice in punishing sin. We will also adore his incarnate Son who has the same hatred for sin as the Father. And we will thank him for offering himself as a victim of propitiation for the sins of the world. We will admire the spirit of penance in the Church.
- II. We will reflect upon these three things included in the virtue of penance: a deep hatred of sin; a keen sorrow at the recollection of past offenses; and an earnest desire to repair, so far as we can, the injury thereby done to God.

1. *Hatred of sin.* Sin is the enemy both of God and of man; it robs us of grace, deprives us of our right to heaven, and condemns us to eternal hell. If penance is little practiced, is it not because we do not feel for sin that horror which begets a longing to offer expiation? We will confess how far we are from the penitential sentiments and practices of God's saints and will ask God to give us something of his own deep hatred for sin.

2. *Sorrow for past offenses.* We have become guilty of sin repeatedly—sin which God hates

and punishes, which we should likewise detest and avoid. Having offended God so often, we must acknowledge our sins and contritely retract them.

3. *The desire to expiate our sins.* Our divine model of penitence underwent a bitter agony, submitted to the torments and humiliations of his trial and crucifixion as an expiation for our sins. We will consider the most available means of practicing penance, namely: the faithful performance of our duties, voluntary mortifications, and zealous devotion to the sacred ministry.

III. We will compare our acts of penance with the number and gravity of our offenses and see what a disproportion there is. We will ask our Savior, the most perfect model of true penance, to give us the grace of desiring to offer reparation for our offenses against God.

We will resolve:

1. Often to recall our past sins and to bewail them before God;
2. To unite ourselves more and more closely to the sentiments and dispositions of Christ, our model of penance;
3. To offer God in union with our blessed Lord whatever suffering we have to undergo as well as whatever penances we may voluntarily practice;
4. To offer up in the spirit of penance the difficulties and hardships involved in the proper performance of our daily duties.

In spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito suscipiamur a te, Domine.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God's rigorous justice in punishing sin. He sees in sin the enemy of his glory, a wickedness that dishonors the work of his hands, defiles its beauty, profanes its holiness. While towards everything else in the world God extends his love and mercy, towards sin he is severe and irreconcilable. As a punishment for sin, he expelled the rebellious angels from heaven, condemned Adam and all humanity to labor and death; because of sin he created hell and its sufferings, and his divine Son became incarnate and suffered death.

Let us adore the incarnate Son of God who has the same hatred for sin. Let us thank him for his desire to atone for the indignity committed against God's divine majesty, offering himself as a victim of propitiation. *He was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins.¹* Hence Jesus experienced so great sadness in the Garden of Olives; his agony was produced by the sight of the world's sins with which he felt himself laden.

Let us admire the penitential spirit in the

¹ Is. 53^b

Church. She never ceases to exhort her children to the practice of penance, and the sacred liturgy, which expresses her life, is replete with marks of compunction and atonement. It is the need of penance that has caused the saints to practice heroic mortification that has led the Church to institute the holy season of Lent, during which she enjoins on her children practices of penance and expiation for sin.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to produce in us a sincere desire to practice penance.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The virtue of penance includes three things: a deep hatred of sin; a keen sorrow at the recollection of past offenses; and an earnest desire to repair, so far as we can, the injury thereby done to God.

1. *Hatred of sin.* It is the enemy both of God and of man. By the light of faith it is disclosed to us as the cruel murderer of our Savior. Staining and deforming the souls of men, it makes them an object of abomination in the sight of God. In this life it robs us of the supernatural gifts of grace, as also in the next life it deprives us of our right to heaven and condemns us to the eternal sufferings of

hell. No misfortune can befall a man comparable to the evil of committing sin.

To begin the work of penance, which is required of us sinners, we must first be strongly impressed with this truth. If indeed there are few who really practice penance, if, even among Christians who desire to be faithful to their duties, the obligation of penance is seldom appreciated and this virtue so little practiced, is it not principally because most of us are not thoroughly convinced of the odious character of sin, are not sufficiently aware of the depth of its iniquity, do not feel for sin that horror which begets a longing to offer expiation?

We are surprised at the spirit of penance manifested by the saints of God. How many of them, whose pure lives are stained only by slight faults, nevertheless felt bound to offer great satisfaction to God? These practices of the saints we should not call pious exaggerations or excesses of scrupulous conscience; but we should see therein a sign of the hatred with which the saints regarded sin; for, enlightened by God's grace, they believed that a whole life consecrated to expiation was not too much to obtain pardon for their own slight offenses.

Let us humbly confess how far removed we are from such sentiment and let us ask God to give us something of his own deep hatred for sin, without which we can never be truly penitent.

2. *Sorrow for past offenses.* This is the result of hatred for sin when applied to ourselves. We ought to confess with the holy prophet: *We have sinned . . . we have acted unjustly, we have wrought iniquity.*¹ We have, also, become guilty of sin, not merely once nor a few times only, but repeatedly —sin which God hates and punishes, which we ought likewise to detest and avoid. Perhaps the recollection of our first sins carries us back to the earliest memories of our youth. At the remembrance of all the offenses committed since then, the strange abuse of God's gifts, the wilful loss of his precious grace, what other disposition can we have but sorrow and repentance?

Having offended God so often, perhaps even grievously, must we not acknowledge our sins, retract those evil thoughts in which we took pleasure, those words which have wounded

¹ Ps. 105^a

Christian virtues, those acts by which we have broken his holy law?

Every time that I have prepared to receive the sacrament of Penance, thy grace, dear Lord, has produced this sorrow in my heart. But that is not enough. I must keep repeatedly before me the enormity of sin, that I may say with the royal psalmist: *My sin is always before me.*¹

3. *The desire to expiate our sins.* The divine model of penitence, our Lord and Savior, not only underwent a bitter agony in the Garden of Olives at the sight of the world's sins, but as our Redeemer, charged with all our iniquity, he submitted to the torments and humiliations of his trial and crucifixion. *He was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins.*²

After his example and under the inspiration of his spirit, truly penitent souls, not satisfied with lamenting their sins, have always been eager to offer abundant expiation to God both for their own and for the sins of others. Thus it is that we see them imposing upon themselves great sacrifices, austerities, self-denials.

¹ Ps. 50⁶

² Is. 53⁶

Have we the true spirit of penance if we are not moved by the same dispositions, if, having so often offended God, we do nothing to satisfy his justice?

Let us consider the most available means of fulfilling this obligation. In the first place there is the faithful performance of the duties of our state in life. From the greatest to the most insignificant, these all entail some sacrifice, some constraint, some violence to the inclinations of our nature.

Secondly, we have voluntary mortifications. The suffering which such mortifications cause us is a legitimate atonement for the pleasure we have taken in sin. *I who have done what was forbidden, says St. Gregory, will now refrain even from what is permitted.*¹ By sin we misuse the creatures of earth and the pleasure which they are intended to procure for us. Is it not just that we should punish ourselves by foregoing even the permissible use of them?

A third method of practicing penance presents itself to the priest in zealous devotion to his sacred ministry. What is better fitted to expiate sin than to labor to destroy its empire

¹ *Hom. 34 in Evang.*

in the world? What is more efficacious to repair our outrages against God than to devote our life to bringing souls to him that they may serve him on earth and glorify him eternally in heaven? This sacrifice is especially fruitful for God's glory and the salvation of souls.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Dear Lord, in thee we find the most perfect model of true penance, for no other penitent ever destested sin as didst thou, none ever deplored it so bitterly, none ever expiated for it so cruelly. Thou givest to men the grace of repentance, inspiring them with the desire and courage to practice penance.

If we compare our acts of penance with the number and gravity of our offenses, what a disproportion there is! To expiate slight faults the saints imposed great suffering on themselves. But what effort have we made to satisfy God's justice in reparation for our sins against him? We ask of thee, divine Savior, the grace to offer satisfaction to the offended justice of our heavenly Father.

We resolve:

1. Often to recall our past sins and to bewail them before God;
2. To unite ourselves more and more closely to the sentiments and dispositions of Christ, our model of penance;
3. To offer God in union with our blessed Lord whatever suffering we have to undergo as well as whatever penances we may voluntarily practice;
4. To offer up in the spirit of penance the difficulties and hardships involved in the proper performance of our daily duties.

In spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito suscipiamur a te, Domine.¹

¹ *Missal*

XXVII

BODILY MORTIFICATION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore almighty God condemning our first parents to a life of labor and suffering. For all of us bodily mortification is necessary to true holiness. Our Savior himself submitted to this law. He has taught us that to follow him we must renounce ourselves and take up the cross. This is also the constant teaching and practice of St. Paul.

II. The Church in the preface for Lent draws our attention to three results of bodily mortification: it represses our evil inclinations, disposes our soul to contemplate the things of God, and enriches us with virtues and merit.

1. *It represses our evil inclinations.* The most violent and dangerous of the passions are those which refer to the life of the senses which is seated in the body and ministers to our bodily pleasures. But the dominance of the flesh is weakened by bodily mortification.

2. *It disposes our soul to contemplate the things of God.* By submission to the sway of the senses, our spiritual vision is obscured, our soul becomes

more sordid and less capable of contemplating divine truths. But bodily mortification gives us greater power to rise to the consideration of spiritual things and prepares us to receive the heavenly light of divine grace.

3. *It enriches us with virtues and merit.* God will reward us for the sacrifices that we make in the practice of self-denial.

III. If we pretend to be true Christians, we should willingly forego some of the satisfactions that our senses desire. We will ask ourselves whether we are convinced that at times we should renounce even those pleasures which we may indulge without sin.

We will resolve:

1. To esteem bodily mortification highly;
2. To profit by the occasions to practice this virtue;
3. To impose on ourselves some little voluntary mortification every day.

They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore almighty God condemning our first parents after the fall to a life of labor and suffering. *Cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life.¹* Work and struggle,

¹ GEN. 3¹⁷

which are necessary to sustain man's temporal life, are still more necessary to preserve and strengthen him in the life of grace. So the obligation of practicing bodily mortification is imposed on man as an indispensable condition of true holiness.

Our Savior himself submitted to this law. According to his teaching, we must hate our corporal life in order to save the spiritual life; we must restrain our eye, our foot, our hand, which are so often means of scandal; we must renounce ourselves, take up the cross, and follow our divine Master. And what is the example of his life? He was born in the midst of privation, passed most of his earthly life at the work of a carpenter, began his public mission by a rigorous fast, wore himself out with works of zeal, and during the painful hours of his passion endured most cruel physical suffering. St. Paul, one of the inspired interpreters of our Savior's teaching, preached bodily mortification and practiced it most rigorously. Does he not tell us explicitly that he exercised his apostolic mission in privations and sufferings of every sort? *In tribulation, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in prisons, in seditions, in labours, in watchings, in fast-*

ings.¹ I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection.²

Let us humbly and gratefully accept this divine teaching. Let us reproach ourselves for laxity in the practice of bodily mortification and ask our blessed Lord to give us the grace to appreciate the value and necessity of this Christian virtue.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The Church in the preface for Lent thanks almighty God for repressing our evil inclinations by means of bodily mortifications, for thus disposing our souls to contemplate things divine, and for enriching us with virtue and merit. *Qui corporali jejunio vitia comprimis mentem elevas, virtutem largiris et præmia.*³ In these words she acknowledges the advantages of mortification and shows us the motives we should have in practicing it.

1. *Bodily mortification represses our evil inclinations.* Of all the passions of our nature, perpetually disturbing our heart and ever en-

¹ II COR. 6¹⁻⁸

² I COR. 9²⁷

³ Preface for Lent

ticing us to sin, the most violent and most dangerous are those which refer to the life of sense, that deeply rooted tendency which makes us always seek our pleasure and enjoyment.

That satisfaction which God in his wisdom permits us to enjoy in the use of creatures sometimes becomes with the advent of sin a dangerous snare. We make of this pleasure, intended to be a real help and to serve our good, an end to be sought for its own sake, and often we pursue it to excess. But this life of sense is seated in the body and ministers to our bodily pleasures. That is why St. Paul calls it the law of the members, saying: *I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members.*¹ And so he designates by the flesh that concupiscence which leads us to seek pleasure inordinately. *The flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another: so that you do not the things that you would.*² Again he says: *I know that there dwelleth not in me, that is to say, in my flesh,*

¹ ROM. 7²³

² GAL. 5¹⁷

that which is good.¹ I myself, with the mind serve the law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin.²

The life of the senses, which thrives on physical pleasure, is gradually weakened by bodily mortification. It is a matter of experience that the more we concede to our sinful appetites the more they dominate our lives. On the other hand, the more we resist them, the more submissive and docile they become and the more our will regains that dominion which belongs to it.

2. Bodily mortification disposes our soul to contemplate the things of God. The holy doctors of the Church and all masters of the spiritual life, when advising those whom God calls to a life of prayer, recommend the mortification of the senses as a most fundamental disposition of the soul. St. Ambrose says: *He who represses the body, strengthens the spirit.³* *If we wish to elevate our soul to heavenly things,* says St. Gregory, *we must mortify our carnal passions.⁴*

¹ ROM. 7¹⁸

² ROM. 7²⁵

³ *De Pœnit.* 1¹²

⁴ *In I Reg. ch. 4*

The saints of God have amply confirmed this teaching by their lives. By the practice of mortification they were able to reach so high a degree of contemplation. According as they freed themselves from the sway of the senses, their union with God became more intimate and constant, their spiritual consolations more abundant, their prayer more elevated.

By submission to the sway of the senses, our spiritual vision is obscured, our soul becomes more sordid and less capable of applying itself to the contemplation of divine truths. Moreover it diminishes our purity of heart, making our motives more carnal and developing the lower inclinations which seek exterior gratification.

Bodily mortification, however, produces quite contrary effects. It gives us greater power to rise to the consideration of spiritual things and to comprehend them, and prepares us for the reception of the heavenly light of divine grace. But above all it purifies the heart and gradually stifles inordinate desires for earthly things, making us more capable of that union with God which is produced by prayer.

3. Bodily mortification enriches us with virtues and merit. By the practice of mortification a soul becomes pleasing to God, who then showers on it the abundance of his grace. Strengthened by this help and further encouraged by its victories over the life of the senses, our will grows more deeply rooted in supernatural habits and Christian virtue.

St. Basil tells us that *mortification brings peace and quiet to the soul and that it is a fruitful source of virtue.*¹ Again in Origen we read that *if the carnal senses are mortified, the spiritual senses develop; and according as vices disappear new virtues spring up in the soul.*²

Moreover the practice of mortification increases our heavenly merit. This consoling thought is well calculated to sustain our courage and to make us generous in the sacrifices that we offer to God. There will come a day when we shall be repaid a hundredfold for the privations that we impose on ourselves in the spirit of mortification. None of these self-restraints that we offer to God, however slight, will be forgotten. Our fellow-men may not

¹ *In Const. 5.*

² *Hom. I in Ex.*

observe them, but they will not escape the all-seeing eye of the divine Master who inscribes them in the book of life.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Dear Lord, while on earth thou didst lead a life of mortification. Thy holy saints have ever followed in the same path after thy example. It is indeed unreasonable for us to pretend to be true Christians and yet not wish to forego any of the satisfactions that our senses desire. We can not be disciples of thine if we seek only an easy life, free from privations and hardship.

I am thoroughly convinced that I must shun every sinful pleasure. But am I persuaded that, at times, directing my conduct by discretion and prudence, I should renounce even those pleasures which I may indulge without sin? Have I not called the mortification practiced by the saints pious exaggeration in order to excuse my own laxity? Is it not true that I do not mortify myself? Do I not hesitate to make even slight sacrifices and try to avoid all suffering?

How far I am, my Savior, from following

thy recommendations and imitating thy example in the practice of mortification! Give me the grace to become a faithful disciple of thy holy cross.

I resolve:

1. To esteem bodily mortification highly;
2. To profit by the occasions to practice this virtue;
3. To impose on myself some little voluntary mortification every day.

They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh.¹

¹ GAL. 5²⁴

XXVII

SPIRITUAL MORTIFICATION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our divine Master imposing upon all Christians the obligation to practice spiritual mortification, that is to practice self-denial and to carry our cross willingly. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* We will admire our Lord's practice of mortification and will ask for the grace to participate in his self-renunciation.

II. We will consider some of the reasons why spiritual mortification is more important than bodily mortification.

1. *Its object.* It is our free-will that we sacrifice by spiritual mortification; it is ourselves that we offer to God.

2. *Its obligation.* So universal and ever binding is this law that it extends to all ages, to all conditions of life; no one is ever dispensed from its practice.

3. *Its difficulty and merit.* It costs not a little to subdue the flesh, but it cost much more to rule the movements of the heart. Moreover, to prac-

tice mortification of the interior life requires continual application. It is more meritorious.

4. *Freedom from excess.* In mortifying the flesh it is easy to exceed the limits of moderation. But when we struggle against the disorders of self-will, the renunciation involved therein is not in danger of becoming ill-regulated.

5. *The beneficent results.* Interior mortification is more efficacious than merely exterior, in combating the evil tendencies of our nature; for its influence is more profound and more universal.

III. Holy Writ teaches us that true penance does not consist in rending our garments but in mortifying our heart. We will ask ourselves whether we practice interior mortification.

We will resolve:

1. From time to time to penetrate the depths of our soul by self-examination that we may take account of its inmost secret tendencies;

2. To endeavor to correct and repress all inordinate inclinations.

O Jesu, vivens in Maria... dominare omni adversæ potestati in Spiritu tuo.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Master imposing upon all Christians the obligation to practice spiritual mortification: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his*

*cross, and follow me.*¹ Two things are hereby recommended: first, to practice self-renunciation, that is to restrain our imagination, to oppose our evil inclinations, to moderate our desires, in all things to substitute the will of God for our own; secondly, to carry our cross, that is, to accept without complaint the grief, sadness, bitterness, trials of every sort which we meet on the pathway of life. In these two things consists the practice of spiritual mortification.

Our Lord, who proclaims the law of mortification so positively, is the first to submit to it himself. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written: *The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell upon me.*² And the sole rule of his life was the will of his heavenly Father, whom he strove to please in all things. *For I do always the things that please him,*³ he said. *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me.*⁴ Especially did he fulfil this holy will when he lovingly accepted the cross. Courageously and without a murmur he carried

¹ MATTH. 16²⁴

² ROM. 15³

³ JOHN 8²⁹

⁴ JOHN 4²⁴

it on his shoulders from the pretorium to Calvary; and with never a complaint was nailed to this cruel gibbet, *who having joy set before him, endured the cross.*¹

Let us ask for the grace to participate in these self-renunciations of the Sacred Heart of Jesus so as to be numbered among his faithful disciples.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The laws of the Church, the example of the saints, the spirit of the gospel, make known to us the duty of bodily mortification. But spiritual mortification is much more important, for its object is more excellent, its obligation is more binding, its practice is more difficult and hence more meritorious; it is less liable to excess, its fruits are more abundant and precious.

1. *Its object.* Every mortification is a self-sacrifice that we offer to God. In bodily mortification our body is the victim and we sacrifice its lower, carnal satisfactions. But we have something higher and nobler than our

¹ HEB. 12²

physical organism. We have a soul, endowed with lofty faculties, with a thinking intellect and a free will that is master of its deliberate acts. This is the victim sacrificed by spiritual mortification; fitly, therefore, is it called self-denial. What we renounce is not only our most precious possession, it is ourself. What do we possess that is more excellent and more worthy to be offered a sacrifice to God?

2. *Its obligation.* Bodily austerities, however holy, however salutary, are not absolutely necessary. The law of God forbids us to indulge in sinful pleasures; but it does not directly prescribe physical privations. The Church, indeed, in her wise care for our souls, urges us to fast and to practice abstinence at stated times, but, when necessary, she consents to moderate the severity of this precept and at times even to dispense some altogether from the obligation.

But it is not the same with spiritual mortification. Almighty God, who surrenders all the rest of creation to our service, requires absolutely from us the sacrifice of our will. So universal and ever binding is this law that it extends to all ages, to all conditions of life; it is so rigorous that one is never dispensed

from its practice. Never can we substitute our own caprice for reason, our inclinations for order, our own self-will for the will of God.

3. *The difficulty and merit.* It costs not a little, it is true, to subdue the flesh, but it costs much more to rule the movements of the heart. The former requires a generous effort from time to time, but spiritual mortification demands a continual application. To practice mortification in the interior life we must faithfully guard the movements of our soul and direct the exercise of all our faculties. It is a ceaseless and sometimes painful restraint which quickly tires our nature and which those only can practice perseveringly who are endowed with a strong and generous will. How many practice bodily mortification to a greater or less extent every day who, nevertheless, seem not to have strength to repress dissipation of mind, to cure their defects of character, to renounce the pleasure of flattered self-love, to accept humiliation, or forgive an insult? This mortification is by far more difficult than that of the senses and therefore merits a greater reward from our Father in heaven.

4. *Freedom from excess.* In mortifying the flesh it is easy to exceed the limits of moder-

ation, to give way to imprudent zeal, to think that we are practicing a holy virtue whilst we are undermining our health and incapacitating ourselves for the fulfilment of weightier obligations. It sometimes happens that we are inspired to practice bodily mortification by a secret vanity or a desire to be unlike those about us.

But we have not the same reason to fear this excess in the practice of spiritual mortification. When we struggle against our evil tendencies and correct the disorders of self-will, the self-renunciation involved therein is not in danger of becoming ill-regulated. Moreover, we can assure ourselves that all the sacrifices which spiritual mortification requires of us are pleasing to God and are inspired by his grace.

Since the sanctuary of the soul is hidden from the gaze of men, pride can not enter in to diminish the merit of our mortification and the purity of our intention. God alone witnesses our internal struggles against unruly passions, the victories that we gain with the help of his grace, the violence that we inflict on our nature, the effort and sacrifice required by duty.

5. *The beneficent results.* The principal fruit of mortification is to destroy the evil tendencies of our nature so that our whole being may be subject to the sway of our Lord Jesus Christ. Interior mortification is more efficacious than merely exterior, in combating these tendencies, for its influence is more profound.

The life of sin, though it may find expression chiefly in our external acts, yet is rooted in our disordered will, impatient of every yoke and wishing to be a law unto itself. But interior mortification seeks to uproot it altogether or at least to prevent its pernicious growth.

This mortification of the spirit is also more universal in its effects than that of the body. For its influence reaches every part of our nature; it guards and regulates the thoughts of the mind, it purifies the affections of the heart, it maintains the uprightness of the will. Thus does our nature most completely submit to the yoke of Jesus Christ so that his grace may take full possession of our soul.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

By the mouth of thy holy prophet, thou, O Lord, dost teach us that true penance does not

consist in rending our garments but in mortifying our heart. Thou didst reject the fasting of the carnal-minded Jews because while imposing rigorous fasts they freely followed their unrestrained and wicked desires.

Have I been thus deceived, believing that to fulfil the duty of mortification it suffices to impose on myself some little restraints in the matter of food or rest or some other material thing, while at the same time neglecting to practice interior mortification which is by far the more important element of self-renunciation? Am I satisfied to make my body undergo some suffering or inconvenience without endeavoring to subdue the inordinate attachments of the heart, without making my natural impulses and passions conform to the laws of duty and righteousness? Do caprice, curiosity, vanity, self-love in its various forms, hold sway over my conduct?

By thy grace, dear Lord, instil into my heart a sincere and earnest desire to practice spiritual mortification.

I resolve:

1. From time to time to penetrate the depths of my soul by self-examination that I may take account of its inmost secret tendencies;

2. To endeavor to correct and repress all inordinate inclinations.

O Jesu, vivens in Maria dominare omni adversæ potestati, in Spiritu tuo.

XXIX

CHASTITY

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our Savior's great love for purity. The lofty practice of this virtue seems to make souls particularly attractive to him. We have the notable example of his blessed Mother, of St. Joseph, and of St. John the Apostle. Our Savior counseled absolute continency as a state of greater perfection. But for those who enter the priesthood, celibacy is a strict obligation.
- II. We will consider the eminent state of perfection to which the practice of purity leads, the advantages that result therefrom, and the efforts required to practice it faithfully.

1. *The eminent state of perfection to which it leads.* The fathers of the Church all agree in praising the superior excellence of virginity. The more the soul disengages itself from the flesh to live according to the spirit, the more perfect it becomes. Chastity separates us from the world of sense in the practice of lofty virtue.

2. *The advantages resulting from the practice of chastity.* The mind is disposed for the reception of things divine. We who professedly are occupied

with the truths of God should keep our heart always pure as a constant preparation for our studies. And the practice of chastity helps to unite us to God.

3. *The efforts required to practice chastity faithfully.* The delicacy of this virtue, makes its preservation especially difficult. Oftentimes it is well to face our temptations squarely; but this would be dangerous in the case of those which threaten holy purity; safety must be sought in flight. Chastity is endangered by the concupiscence of our fallen nature and by the seductions of the world around us.

III. We will recall how eagerly and generously we offered ourselves to God on the day of our tonsure or subdiaconate. We relied on the help of his grace to preserve the treasure of our chastity intact. We will ask for the graces necessary to safeguard this precious virtue.

We will resolve:

1. To protect ourselves from circumstances and influences, whether in our own nature or from without, that would endanger holy purity;
2. Often to ask God to preserve our heart in perfect purity.

Jesu, amator castitatis, miserere nobis.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our Savior's great love for the virtue of purity. So manifest was Christ's

spotlessness that his enemies, ever eager to misconstrue and censure his conduct, and even calumniating him on other points, could at no time accuse him in connection with this virtue.

The lofty practice of this angelic virtue seems to make souls particularly attractive to him. His blessed Mother we are proud to salute as Mary ever Virgin; St. Joseph, the guardian and protector of his infancy, likewise practiced perfect continency. Among the apostles whom he chose to be his representatives, to continue his divine mission, to preach his gospel, he selected St. John especially to become the object of his predilection and particular affection, the confidant of his secrets. The sacred narrative calls him the disciple whom Jesus loved. *It was his special prerogative of chastity, says St. Jerome, that made him worthy of so great love.*¹

The Savior did not wish to bind his disciples by a precept of absolute continency; but he counseled it as a state of greater perfection, and it is by the impulse of his spirit and the powerful help of his grace that so many souls, attracted by the beauty and excellence of this

¹ *Contra Jovinianum.*

virtue, have happily offered to God the practice of a life-long chastity.

Celibacy, only a counsel for those of the faithful who are called thereto, is a strict obligation for those who enter the holy priesthood. They who would become dispensers of the mysteries of God, who aspire to the honor of immolating on the altar and distributing to the faithful the virgin body of Christ, must immolate themselves by a life of continence.

Let us admire the reflection of Christ's holy purity in so many holy virgins, religious, levites, priests, and bishops. Let us all our life thank our divine Master for inspiring us to enter into this sacred contract, for the light to appreciate its worth, for courage to impose the obligation on ourselves, and fidelity in its fulfilment.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

That we may love the life of celibacy more and more, let us consider the eminent state of perfection to which it contributes; the advantages that result from it; and the efforts required to practice it faithfully.

1. *The eminent state of perfection to which it contributes.* Says the inspired word of God, *O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory.*¹ Christ, our Master, the model of every perfection, chose this state for himself and testified in many ways that those who imitate him in this choice are the object of his special love. His faithful disciple, St. Paul, praises its superior excellence. The holy fathers, interpreters of Christ's divine teaching, all agree with the sentiment expressed by St. Athanasius in characterizing virginity, as *an inexhaustible treasure, an imperishable crown, temple of God, dwelling of the Holy Spirit, the glory of the angels, the crown of saints.*² *There is something angelic about chastity,* says St. John Chrysostom. *By it men become like unto angels.*³ Herein we may see why the religious state requires the practice of celibacy as an essential condition, why the Church requires it of her priests, who should be the light of the world, excelling in whatever is most perfect and holy.

¹ WISDOM 4¹

² *Lib. de Virg.*

³ *Hom. 42 on Matth.*

The more the soul disengages itself from the flesh to live according to the spirit, the more perfect it becomes; so, on the other hand, it is debased and rendered more sordid, the more completely it yields to the inclinations of the flesh. Now among these latter there is none more opposed to the law of the spirit than that appetite of the flesh which stands in the way of the practice of purity, none which leads us deeper into the world of sense and which, consequently, hinders us more seriously from that renouncement of exterior things which is a primary element of the perfect life.

Are further reasons necessary to confirm and support these testimonies in showing that chastity practiced for God is a virtue of inestimable worth? To detach our heart from the goods of this world by the practice of poverty, is indeed praiseworthy; it is no less a virtue to mortify the body by self-imposed sufferings; but to sacrifice completely the lower satisfactions of the flesh is still more perfect; for it is separation from the world of sense in the practice of lofty virtue.

2. The advantages resulting from the practice of chastity. The inspired word points out

especially three consequences. In the first place we have Christ's own declaration: *Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.*¹ Chastity, by removing the carnal images with which the influences of the senses surround us, disposes our mind for the reception of things divine. It opens the inner eye of the soul; and purifies our spiritual vision by scattering the shadows that obscured it. It is, according to the *Imitation*, one of the two wings that raise us above the things of earth to the heavenly region where we are permitted to contemplate God. *A pure heart penetrates heaven.*²

As a constant preparation for our studies we should keep our heart always pure, so as clearly to apprehend the things of God. Let us consider the objects of our study: God, his divine grace, his holy law, his sacraments, the great mystery of the Incarnation, the religion which he established on earth. To penetrate these lofty truths, to discern these mysteries, to become prudent and faithful interpreters of his law, how necessary it is

¹ MATTH. 5⁸

² IMIT. II 4²

that our hearts be chaste; how we should love that holy purity which the Church imposes upon us!

Besides helping us to contemplate the perfections of almighty God, the practice of chastity unites us to him. Love effects the union of the soul with God whereby, with the support of a complete detachment from created things, we elevate ourselves to him as our supreme good. But we can not better prepare for this intimate union with him, this fruit of love, than by chastity. In overcoming our carnal attachments, this holy virtue develops in us a great desire for God and renders more delicate and keen that spiritual sense which enables us to enter by anticipation into the possession of God himself. The perfection of divine love has been the privilege of chaste souls. They are permitted to live in the holy and intimate society of God; they delight in him, they find their joy and consolation in him. To converse with him, to meditate on his greatness, to praise and glorify him, to spread his kingdom of righteousness, these loving activities form their fondest occupation.

3. The efforts required to practice chastity

faithfully. The delicacy of this virtue, the violence with which it is assaulted, the natural inclination of our will to yield, all these circumstances unite to make the practice of chastity very difficult.

In its delicacy this virtue is like a highly polished surface that is dimmed by even a light breath, like a perfume that begins to evaporate as soon as we open the vessel which contains it, like a sensitive-plant whose leaves recoil at a slight touch; such are the figures employed by masters of the spiritual life to express the fragility of this delicate virtue. A glance, a desire, a thought may suffice to blemish it. Its very frailty requires that the vigilance necessary for its preservation should be exercised without our thinking of it.

When it is a question of the other virtues we can profitably consider the baseness and evil of the contrary vices. But with purity it is far otherwise. Instead of representing to our mind the sins which destroy or mar this virtue in our soul, we must carefully avoid their very image for fear that by their means the poison of impurity should enter our heart.

Oftentimes it is well to face our temptations squarely and steadfastly, for example those of

pride, of anger, of jealousy, and thus prepare to resist them more successfully. But this would be a very dangerous way of trying to resist temptations to impurity. Against the enemies of chastity safety should be sought in flight, which in this case is not disgraceful but, on the contrary, is frequently the only secure means of salvation.

Our first offenses against the other virtues are rarely mortal. Generally it is by a series of acts more and more grievous that we finally come to the commission of mortal sin. But a different law holds true for our sins against purity, which is so fragile that often a sudden surprise suffices to demolish it.

Chastity is endangered not only by its own delicacy but also by numerous enemies from within and without, of which the most to be feared is our own concupiscence. This tendency of our nature inclines us, violently at times, towards the pleasures of sense. In the human heart there is no passion which arouses therein greater tumult, which more profoundly disturbs its peace and serenity. It is a hidden fire ever ready to blaze forth, a smouldering volcano which may suddenly and unexpectedly burst into violent eruption. It is from this

concupiscence of our nature that arise those importuning desires, those disquieting images, that dangerous curiosity, that soft effeminacy.

This internal foe of purity finds auxiliaries in the external seductions which surround us. There is especially the atmosphere of the world, a more subtle danger because we breathe it, as it were, unconsciously. Things that we behold, that we read, that we hear often arouse our concupiscence and supply fuel to the fire of lust.

And what power of resistance do we find in ourselves? Only our will which, left to itself, is so weak. Of all our faculties, none has been more deeply wounded by sin. It ought to command, yet how often does it yield and obey? It is particularly weak in the presence of the enervating attractions of sensual enjoyment.

Since the perfect practice of this virtue is so difficult, it is the more meritorious. The world judges things by their appearance. But God, the searcher of hearts, perceives and values the effort that is put forth. He knows how hard the struggle is at times and he will reward us for our steadfast faithfulness therein.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

On the day of my tonsure, when by the hands of the bishop I was admitted to the ranks of the clergy, the Church, whose minister I hoped to become, declared to me that only the pure of heart should enter the priesthood. *Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord; or who shall stand in his holy place? The innocent in hands, and clean of heart.*¹ And later on when I made the irrevocable consecration of myself to the Lord, when I became a subdeacon, I vowed perfect and perpetual chastity in God's service.

My God, thou dost know how eagerly and generously I made that offering, thou dost know the happiness of my soul when, having taken the decisive step, I felt myself freed from the bonds of the flesh, henceforth separated from the world by an eternal barrier. Not in the weakness of my fallen nature, not in my own feeble will did I place my confidence to preserve this treasure of purity intact, but in the power of thy grace. Thou didst call me to give myself to thee. Could I

¹ Ps. 23^{a-4}

suppose thou wouldest abandon me to my weak self in case of temptation? Should I not rather count on special help to enable me to remain faithful to the sacred contract which thou didst inspire me to make? In thee I have hoped and thou hast sustained and strengthened me in times of temptation.

By thy saints thou dost warn me not to rely presumptuously on my past chastity and not to rest in false security. Vouchsafe, therefore, to bestow upon me the abundance of thy graces: grace to understand the excellence of the holy virtue of purity; grace to love it as a precious possession; grace to strengthen my will in the struggle against temptations that seek to destroy it; grace of vigilance over my thoughts and desires to prevent the beginnings of impurity; grace of prudence and circumspection to sustain me on dangerous occasions that may threaten this virtue.

I ask these of thee through the intercession of Mary, the virgin immaculate, model and patron of purity, guardian of priestly chastity. Relying on her protection, I resolve:

1. To safeguard myself from circumstances and influences, whether in my nature or from

without, that would endanger holy purity;

2. Often to ask God to preserve my heart
in perfect purity.

Jesu, amator castitatis, miserere nobis.

XXX

VIGILANCE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore in Christ our perfect model of vigilance. With great care he protects and watches over his Church. He is the Good Shepherd, ever vigilant and solicitous for the souls of men. And he insistently urges us to be watchful. We will invoke the Holy Ghost to make us realize the importance of this virtue.

II. Vigilance consists in watching carefully over our thoughts, our attachments, our willful acts, our imaginations, our speech. We will consider three advantages that should make us value this virtue.

1. *It forewarns us against the attractions of sin*, which are to be the more guarded against since they more often consist in scarcely perceptible seductions than in open warfare. And vigilance is our first and most efficacious protection. It is our only assurance of safety.

2. *It provides a sure means to faithfully follow the inspirations of grace*. Fidelity to God's grace is impossible without constant watchfulness. For, if we are to admit Christ to our heart, we must

first recognize his presence and harken to his appeal. This requires that we be alert and vigilant.

3. It is a guarantee against the surprise of death. Watch ye therefore, our Lord warns us, because you know not the day nor the hour. The consideration of the last things is a familiar thought with a vigilant soul. Death will not be a surprise to one thus prepared. *Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find so doing.*

III. We will ask ourselves whether we take the precautions dictated by Christian prudence to safeguard ourselves from dangerous temptations. We will ask our Savior for the grace of vigilance in the work of our salvation and sanctification.

We will resolve:

1. Each morning to foresee, so far as we can, the faults to which we may be exposed and the acts of virtue that we may be able to perform;
2. To examine the state of our soul with greater vigilance.
3. To make a serious examination of conscience every night.

The Lord has promised a crown to those who watch.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore in Christ our perfect model of vigilance. He constantly exercised this watchfulness over his entire life on earth: bringing all his thoughts, the desires and aspirations of his heart, the acts of his will into perfect con-

formity with the holy will of God, so that he could truly say: *I do always the things that please him.*¹ With the same care he watches over his Church: surrounding it with his protection, defending it against its enemies, enlightening it by his grace, preserving it from error, bestowing upon it treasures of sanctity and supernatural life. He is the Good Shepherd, ever vigilant and solicitous for the souls of men: all are precious in his sight and all are the object of his care. Upon them he generously bestows his grace, always ready to help and encourage them; he follows after them; in his infinite mercy he calls them back when they have strayed from the fold.

Besides giving us his own example, he repeatedly commands us to practice vigilance. This insistence shows us the importance which he attaches to it. *Watch ye therefore*, he says, *because you know not what hour your Lord will come.*² And again: *Watch ye therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour.*³ *What I say to you, I say to all: Watch.*⁴ His warning

¹ JOHN 8²⁹

² MATTH. 24⁴²

³ MATTH. 25¹³

⁴ MARK 13³⁷

to Peter, James, and John in Gethsemani was: *Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation.*¹ And elsewhere in the inspired word we read: *Blessed is he that watcheth.*²

Let us thank our Savior for these admonitions and let us cherish them in our heart. Let us invoke the Holy Ghost to make us realize the importance of this virtue, to give strength and courage to our will so that we may faithfully practice it.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Vigilance consists in watching carefully over our thoughts, the inclinations and affections of our heart, the acts of our will, the impressions of our senses, the temperance of our speech. We find in the practice of this virtue three principal advantages that should help us to value it highly: it forewarns us against the attractions of sin; it assures us of a means of faithfully following the supernatural inspirations of grace; and it is a guarantee against the surprise of death.

1. *Vigilance forewarns us against the attrac-*

¹ MATTH. 26⁴¹

² APOC. 16¹⁵

tions of sin. Holy Scripture calls the tempter a lion that is ever watching for a favorable moment to seize upon its unsuspecting prey. *Be sober and watch: because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour.*¹ Thus does the inspired word warn us that we must fear the snares which this enemy of our soul prepares to effect our spiritual ruin. The world, by which those seductive attractions and temptations in the midst of which we live are designated, is the second enemy of our soul. We must also fear the disastrous influence of the evil inclinations of our own heart.

Sin threatens us and besieges us on every side. Even our senses may become an open door for the admission of our enemy. We journey through life by a straight and narrow path bordered on either side by abysses into which we may fall at any moment when off our guard. The dangerous attractions of sin are the more to be guarded against since they more often consist in subtle and scarcely perceptible seductions than in evident and open warfare.

¹ I PETER 5³

What safeguards shall we employ so as to avoid these numerous snares that everywhere abound, to walk safely in the midst of enemies that would lead us to eternal ruin? The first and most efficacious is vigilance. If we sleep in a false security our soul will be like an open and defenseless citadel into which the enemy may enter without hindrance, like the unguarded house spoken of in the gospel, where the devil entered and took up his abode.

We are assured of safety only on condition of constant watchfulness. For then only will we perceive the first slight signs of the dangers that threaten us. In no other way can we be secure against surprise, whether from the attacks of violent temptation or from the hidden ambushes prepared for our destruction.

St. Cyprian says that the devil gains the victory over a Christian who is not vigilant in three ways: by surrounding him unawares, by attacking him when off his guard, by taking advantage of his inexperience. But one who is watchful knows the danger, foresees it, and takes the means to avoid it. Carefully and alertly he guards all the approaches by which sin might gain access.

2. *Vigilance assures us of a means to faith-*

fully follow the supernatural inspirations of grace. The devil indeed is always trying to entrap us; but Christ, on the other hand, watches over us to sanctify us by his grace and to surround us with means of safety. In Holy Writ he is represented as a shepherd guarding his sheep, as an armed fortress that defends the citadel, as a man who stands at the door and knocks until it is opened to him. The royal psalmist, overjoyed at the recollection of the many favors bestowed on him by divine Providence, sings: *Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*¹ God helps us by the light of his grace, by inspirations that draw us nearer to himself, by remorse after our falls. Progress towards perfection in the spiritual life depends especially on faithful correspondence to all of God's graces. But this fidelity is impossible without constant watchfulness.

To open our heart to Christ when he seeks admission, we must first recognize his divine presence and harken to his appeal. But how is this possible if our ear is not attentive to his voice, if we are not vigilant? If we do not watch, if we do not observe what transpires in

¹ Ps. 22⁶

the depths of our soul, we will not hear our Master's words when he comes. Our Lord comes, but we see him not; he asks to be admitted to our heart, but we remain deaf to his voice. So, for want of vigilance, we fail to profit by the gifts of God, we lose the merit that we might acquire by corresponding to these divine inspirations, and we become guilty of many abuses of grace.

But if our soul is alert and watchful, we will be attentive to God's voice when he speaks, we will respect his words, and we will profit by the grace which he offers us. Our continued fidelity will be rewarded by more frequent visits, by more numerous inspirations of grace, by more abundant supernatural light.

3. Vigilance is a guarantee against the surprise of death. This is the principal reason that our Lord himself gives for the practice of vigilance. *Watch ye therefore*, he warns us, *because you know not the day nor the hour.*¹ And in the *Apocalypse* we read: *Be watchful. If then thou shalt not watch, I will come to thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know at what hour I will come to thee.*² The experience of those

¹ MATTH. 25¹³

² APOC. 3²⁻³

on all sides of us confirms the truth of these words. Death generally strikes its victims with little or no warning. According to our Savior's own comparison, it is like a thief who watches for a favorable opportunity to enter when we least expect him. If we wish that this surprise should not be disastrous to our soul, let us be always on our guard: let us watch.

The faithful servant, says our Lord in another simile, does not sleep, but watches that he may be ready to admit the master on his return. So, likewise, a vigilant soul, knowing that the duration of this life is uncertain and may end at any moment, takes care not to sleep in imagined security, but watches for the arrival of the Master, ready to answer his summons. Such a one, by the exercise of vigilance, takes care to keep himself in that state in which he wishes to appear before God's tribunal; his life is a continual preparation for death.

The consideration of the last things is a familiar thought with a vigilant soul. Each night it prepares to meet its God and strives to pass each day as though it were to be its last on earth. So it really has nothing to fear

from the suddenness of death, or rather death will not be a surprise to a soul thus prepared. *Blessed is that servant, whom when his Lord shall come he shall find so doing.*¹

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The priest, because of his many and grave dangers, has special need to practice vigilance. Holy priests are careful not to neglect this means of perfection. Have I followed their example or, on the contrary, is not mine a life without serious reflection? Do I take the precautions dictated by Christian prudence to safeguard myself from dangerous temptations? Do I guard my thoughts that they may not lead me into sin; do I watch for the snares that beset my path lest I fall into them? Is it not for want of vigilance that I know myself so poorly, that I commit so many faults almost without perceiving them, that I make so little progress in virtue?

Jesus, communicate to my soul a participation in thy divine wisdom. *Send her out of thy holy heaven, that I may know what is accept-*

¹ MATTH. 24⁴⁶

*able with thee.*¹ May Christian vigilance enlighten my path and make me prudent in the work of my sanctification as are the children of this world in their temporal affairs. This is the grace I beg of thee, my Savior.

I resolve:

1. Each morning to foresee so far as I can the faults to which I may be exposed and the acts of virtue that I may be able to perform;
2. To examine the state of my soul with greater vigilance;
3. To make a serious examination of conscience every night.

*The Lord has promised a crown to those who watch.*²

¹ WISDOM 9¹⁰

² *Invit. for Lent.*

XXXI

TEMPTATIONS

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our divine Savior, beginning his public life by the mystery of his temptation in the desert. We will thank him for the instruction, example, and grace which he has herein provided for us, knowing that we must be tempted and that we would have need of powerful help.
- II. We will consider some of the advantages that may be derived from temptation if we are faithful to God's grace.

1. *It gives us a means of glorifying Jesus Christ,* for in overcoming temptation we triumph over the devil. To Christ belongs the honor of our victories; they are manifestations of his dominion over the powers of hell, since he wins them in each one of us who resists temptation by his grace.

2. *It perfects our virtue by making it more humble, more firm, more meritorious.* If we are not much tempted, we are in danger of becoming proud. Moreover, no virtue is firm and deep seated unless it has been exercised and proved by temptation. And the merit of our acts, is increased by strife and effort.

3. *It prepares us for the life of the ministry.* By the experience and light that it gives, temptation prepares us to work more effectively for the sanctification of our brethren. It will teach us to be compassionate towards souls that suffer from grievous temptation; and it will enlighten us in the advice that we may be called upon to give.

III. We will ask ourselves how we have regarded temptations. Have we been dejected or discouraged by them? Have we remembered that although the enemy may be strong, the grace of God is still stronger? We will place all our trust in Christ.

We will resolve:

1. Not to expose ourselves needlessly to temptation;
2. Not to be discouraged in its presence but to consider it as permitted by God and as a source of good;
3. To have recourse to God, to our blessed Mother, and to our guardian angel by fervent and confident prayer.

Temptations are often very profitable to a man . . . for in them a man is humbled, purified, and instructed.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our divine Savior beginning his public life by the mystery of his temptation in the desert. He had received baptism at the

hands of John and, to recompense this act of humility, the Holy Spirit gave marvelous testimony to the favor which he found with God. *Then, says Holy Scripture, Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil.*¹ And after he had prepared by a forty days' fast for the trial that awaited him, the devil approached and thrice tempted him to take part in his rebellion against God.

My Jesus, of all the humiliations to which thou didst submit, this is the most incomprehensible. But in this as in all things else save sin thou didst will to become like unto us. *Wherefore it behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren. . . . For in that, wherein he himself hath suffered and been tempted, he is able to succor them also that are tempted.*² Knowing that we must be tempted and that we would have need of powerful help, by thy own temptation thou hast provided for us instruction, example, and grace. For thou hast thereby taught us that if thou, the Word made flesh, wast tempted, we can not expect to be exempted from temptation and that we

¹ MATTH. 4¹

² HEB. 2¹⁷⁻¹⁸

should therefore prepare for it. By thy example thou hast shown us how we should act in the presence of it so as not to be overcome and what weapons we should use to repel the tempter. In baffling the efforts of the devil, thou hast also merited for us the grace that we need in our struggles against temptation.

In this mystery, my God, thou art worthy of all love, praise, and honor. I adore thee; I bless thee; I thank thee. I unite my reverence to that of the angels who, when the devil departed, came and ministered to thee.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

As we should not seek temptations nor rashly expose ourselves so neither should we be discouraged when God permits us to be tempted. If we are faithful to grace and oppose them, we may derive therefrom many advantages. Let us consider some of the most worthy.

1. *Temptation gives us a means of glorifying Jesus Christ.* Christ is glorified when we triumph over the devil, his enemy and ours; for our Savior became incarnate and

dwelt among us to destroy the empire of Satan in the world, founding the kingdom of God on the ruins thereof.

By the temptation in the desert Christ triumphed over the devil. A still more glorious and more complete victory was won in the mysteries of his suffering, his death, and his resurrection, whereby he delivered us from the bondage of sin. *Despoiling the principalities and powers, he hath exposed them confidently in open shew, triumphing over them in himself.*¹ This double triumph has its climax in the victory that he wins in each one of us whenever we resist the devil.

Not to us belongs the honor of our victories over temptation, but to Christ. Weak and powerless of ourselves, we are sure to be overcome in the struggle unless helped by his divine grace. But he is with us as a powerful ally. *The Lord is with me as a strong warrior:* says the prophet: *therefore they that persecute me shall fall and shall be weak.*² Our Savior himself said to his apostles: *I am with you all days.*³ This promise applies not only to the

¹ COLOSS. 2¹⁵

² JER. 20¹¹

³ MATTH. 28²⁰

Church as a whole, but also to the members of which it is composed.

Jesus is with us. He permits us to be tempted; but it is to procure a triumph over the devil, the more glorious as the instruments which he employs are the more feeble. The victories that our Lord wins through us are a more complete manifestation of his divine power and of his dominion over the powers of hell, since he wins them not merely in his humanity, but in each one of us who resists temptation by his grace. Thus does God employ our weakness to overcome the strong. *The weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong.*¹

2. *Temptation perfects our virtue by making it more humble, more firm, more meritorious.* It makes it *more humble*. If we are not much tempted, we are in danger of becoming proud. We easily persuade ourselves that virtue is natural to us and that we need no outside help to practice it. In our presumptuous self-confidence we may believe that we have nothing to fear. But temptation strikes at this double root of pride. It shows us that sin is ever

¹ I COR. 1²⁷

ready to invade our soul. It teaches us also how little we can depend on ourselves and how much need we have of God's grace to remain faithful. *Temptation*, says St. Gregory, *makes us humble; it teaches us what we are of ourselves and prevents us from glorying in our own excellence.*¹ Says another writer: *By temptation man learns what he is of himself and what he is by the grace of God.*²

It also makes our virtue *more firm*. Among spiritual writers it is a common teaching that no virtue is truly deep-seated unless it has been proved by temptation. The strength of a virtue is developed by exercise, especially by struggle.

A soul that has not been tempted does not feel the need of effort and, consequently, does not practice that energy and activity which is provoked by opposition and without which nothing great is possible. On the other hand, a soul accustomed to combat temptation is like a tried warrior; its virtue is deeply rooted and is prepared to withstand great trials.

Temptation makes our virtue *more merito-*

¹ *Moral.* book 23, ch. 17.

² *HUGO, sup. Job, 23.*

rious. The merit of our acts supposes strife and effort, which can not be present without temptation. Says St. Lawrence Justinian: *A man can not receive a crown unless he conquers, he can not conquer unless he combats, he can not combat unless he have an enemy in temptation.*¹ It is temptation therefore that enables us to merit eternal reward; and our reward will be the greater according as the temptations that we overcome are the more violent. If struggle is the condition of merit, our merit will be greater if the struggle is more keen, it will be increased by reason of the obstacles to be overcome, the sacrifices to be made, the courage to be employed, in short by the intensity and duration of the temptations conquered.

3. *Temptation prepares us for the life of the ministry.* In the *Imitation*, we read that man is instructed by temptation. These words have a special application for priests and for those aspiring to the sacred ministry. Temptation, while it sanctifies us, prepares us, by the experience and light that it gives, to work more effectively for the sanctification of our brethren. It is, so to speak, the common law

¹ *De Patientia.*

to which God subjects all souls, some to a greater extent than others. Most souls have serious struggles with temptation; they must know how to repel the attacks of the devil, to escape his snares, to guard themselves against his seductions, and withal to preserve their peace of mind and confidence in God. And for guidance they will depend largely upon their confessors. Our clerical studies have given us rules for the direction of souls; but if we ourselves have experienced temptation, we will know how to apply these rules more prudently and effectively.

In the first place it will teach us to be compassionate towards souls that suffer from grievous temptation. It will inspire our charity, prompting us to help others generously and to bear with them patiently.

Temptation will also enlighten us in the advice that we may be called on to give. By our own experience we will know what remedies to prescribe, what dangers are to be avoided, what means to be taken either to escape temptation or to resist it. Finally, as a reward for our fidelity in the midst of temptation, God will give us a particular grace to help us direct others in temptation. The Holy

Spirit will place on our lips words that will strengthen and encourage them. It is remarkably true that confessors who have been particularly blessed in the direction of tempted souls are often those who have themselves undergone prolonged or violent temptations.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

How have I regarded the temptations that God has permitted for my advancement toward perfection? Have I been dejected or discouraged by them? Have I complained or murmured at the attacks of enemies within and without? When sorely tried, have I sustained my courage by calling to mind that Christ himself was tempted as were all the saints? Have I remembered that, although the enemy may be strong, the grace of God is still stronger? Have I relied upon this help to overcome temptation and to share the advantages that may be derived from it? Is it not because I have depended too much on my own strength and too little on God that I have so often failed in the presence of temptation?

My Jesus, in thee I place all my trust. By thy temptation in the desert thou didst merit

for me the grace to resist the attempts of the devil. I ask this help, my Savior: left to myself I am weak indeed but with the aid of thy grace I can overcome, *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*¹

I resolve:

1. Not to expose myself needlessly to temptation;
2. Not to be discouraged in the presence of temptation, but to consider it as permitted by God and as a source of good;
3. To have recourse to God, to our blessed Mother, and to my guardian angel by fervent and confident prayer.

*Temptations are often very profitable to a man, for in them a man is humbled, purified and instructed.*²

¹ PHILIP. 4¹³

² IMIT. I: 13²

XXXII

PASSIONS

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore our blessed Savior, absolute master of all the powers of his soul. There was never in his soul anything like the inordinate inclinations of our fallen nature. In his soul everything was calm because all was well ordered. We will adore God in the victories which his grace wins over passion in the souls of those who correspond to his proffered help.
- II. We will consider some of the duties we must perform in the struggle with our passions.
 1. *We must try to know them.* The valuable maxim, "know thyself," requires an introspection that must precede any successful effort to perfect ourselves. Our passions especially deserve the attention of our self-examination; especially should we study our ruling passion.
 2. *We must combat our passions.* Otherwise our soul will not enjoy the tranquillity of peace. Without mortifying the passions we can not acquire the habit of prayer. If confirmed in their mastery over us, they are apt to lead us into great excesses of sin. Says St. Bernard: *If we do not trample them under foot, they will become our oppressors.*

3. We must make them the instrument of virtue and perfection. They are not necessarily evil, in themselves, but they have been depraved by original sin. God intended them to give more energy to our activity and help us in the practice of virtue, and this is the use which the saints made of their natural inclinations. They transformed strong, ardent passions into instruments of zeal. The conversion and subsequent sanctity of St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Francis of Assisi are striking and familiar examples.

III. We will acknowledge that the most dangerous enemies against which we have to contend are our passions. We will ask our blessed Lord to help us overcome them and make them serve our sanctification.

We will resolve:

1. To make our passions, especially our dominant passion, the object of particular examination;
2. To make them serve God's greater honor and glory.

In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore our blessed Savior, absolute master of all the powers of his soul. All obeyed his will, and this in turn, hypostatically united to the Word, was enlightened and directed in every act by the Holy Ghost.

There was never in his soul anything like the inordinate inclinations of our fallen nature, inclinations which we can resist but which we can not always destroy. When we give way to immoderate joy, sadness generally follows; when a violent passion leads us eagerly to seek some illicit pleasure, we soon feel inclined to reject what before we sought. It may be pride or ambition that wishes to rule over others, lust that seeks its base satisfaction, envy that strives to supplant a rival. These give rise to insatiable desires, disquieting longings, and troublesome preoccupation. The disordered tumult of the waves aroused by a strong wind is an appropriate image of the tempest which the passions sometimes stir up within us.

In thy soul, my Savior, everything was calm because all was well ordered, like a cloudless sky or an unruffled stream. This serene and unalterable peace was the fruit of the absolute sway which the Holy Spirit exercised in thy soul.

Thou, my Savior, art present to us all; and thou who calmed the wind and stilled the tempest, desirest to perform a similar miracle in our souls. If we are not able entirely to

root our evil passions from our heart, we may, however, sustained and strengthened by thy grace, succeed in controlling them. We may also, by the proper use of them, rise to the practice of heroic virtue.

I adore thee, my God, in the victories which thy grace wins over passion in the souls of those who faithfully correspond to thy prof- fered help.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider some of the duties that we must perform in the struggle with our passions.

1. *We must try to know them.* If we would seriously strive to lead a perfect life, we should first know ourselves. "Know thyself" is a valuable maxim of the ancients and prescribes an introspection that must precede any successful effort to perfect ourselves. Among the objects that deserve the attention of our self-examination, there is, without question, none more important than the inclinations of our human nature.

We may distinguish three degrees of self-knowledge. The first and most external is concerned with the multitude of acts, good,

bad, and indifferent, which our free will leads us to perform. We turn our attention to these when we make our examination of conscience in preparation for confession.

The second degree consists in knowing our passions, those inclinations that stir the soul to its very depths, and that are the source of so much sin. Their influence on our life is enormous; their action is hidden but unceasing, the more forceful and dangerous because so latent. If we wish to make any spiritual progress, let us not forget that the first condition of success is to reckon with these secret tendencies, to observe their presence, their character, their various manifestations. Otherwise the knowledge we have of ourselves will be incomplete and superficial; we will be poorly defended against the enemies of our soul, whose attacks we have to fear.

But the profitable study of our passions requires more than this. Among those inclinations of our nature which are revealed by a serious introspection, there is generally one which exerts a preponderating influence over our moral life, one to which the others are subordinate and secondary: this we call our ruling passion. In one it is pride, in another

sensuality; some are dominated by love of money, while others have to struggle particularly with anger. The more extensive the sway of our ruling passion over our life, the more important it is for us to discover it and to bring it into subjection. If we are to have a true knowledge of ourselves, this must be the principal object of our self-examination.

2. *We must combat our passions.* If we do not, our soul is a scene of trouble and perturbation. *Let us lay the axe to the root*, says the *Imitation*, *that, being purged of passions, we may possess our minds in peace.*¹ Our repeated experience confirms the truth of these words. Peace is the fruit of order. But a soul tossed about at the mercy of the disordered and irregular forces of its passions knows not the taste of peace. Its rejoicing is excessive, its anger is beyond control, its grief is hopeless consternation; restlessness and anxiety destroy its quiet, unsatisfied desires torment it. Not having learned to repress the first movements of passion, it is soon unable to check them at all. Hence it does not enjoy the tranquillity of peace; it suffers from the continual excesses of

¹ IMIT. I: 11⁴

its passions and the consequences are sometimes a source of annoyance and suffering to others.

In the progress of our interior life, we can not dispense with the mortification of the passions. For the interior is nourished by prayer and meditation in which the soul, separating itself from external and material attractions, raises its thought and affection to God, contemplating the divine truths of our holy religion and the maxims of perfection. But without mortifying the passions the soul can not acquire the habit of prayer.

Prayer is a conversation between God and the soul: we address ourselves to God and at the same time he speaks to us. It is expedient, therefore, that our mind and heart should be tranquil and undisturbed by the passionate inclinations of our nature.

If we have not learned to restrain our evil tendencies, the voice of conscience will be stifled by the tumult of passions. We must endeavor to mortify them if we wish to grow in the way of perfection.

A more urgent reason may be found in the fact that our passions, confirmed in their mastery over us, are apt to lead us into great

excesses; in the words of St. Bernard, *if we do not trample them under foot, they will become our oppressors.*¹ It is quite true that the passions of the human heart, if their development is not checked, follow the law of constant growth by which they gain new strength every day. In the beginning a passion may be scarcely perceptible, a slight tendency that can be repressed in the first instance by very little effort; but, unless we have a care, it will grow stronger until it becomes a dominating power, leading us from one sin to another.

There is no crime which may not be the result of uncontrolled passion. If we could penetrate and examine the perverted souls of those degenerates who are now hopelessly sunken in the lowest depths of crime, we would probably find that the beginning of their fall was an uncontrolled passion which grew and grew until it made them its slaves. Even among the chosen disciples of our Lord we find an example of such a one in the person of Judas. In the beginning it is easy to conquer our passions; later on they may become most formidable and oppressive masters.

¹ *Sermon on Ascension*

3. *We must make our passions the instrument of virtue and perfection.* The inclinations of our nature are not necessarily evil. They are sources of energy, stimulating us for good or bad according to the end which we make them subserve. God intended them to help us in the practice of virtue; and although, depraved by original sin, they often lead us to sin, our free will is able to direct them to a good and virtuous end. We may even say that for the most part they are necessary for the accomplishment of anything noble or great or generous. A soul without passion will always be quite mediocre in its virtue. The object of our struggle with our passions is not to destroy but to direct them so as to make of them stimulating auxiliaries in the accomplishment of duty and the practice of virtue.

Such is the use which the saints made of their natural inclinations. For the most part endowed with strong, ardent passions, they might have become great sinners had they allowed these to become their masters. But, as they directed their passions into good channels, they became heroes of sanctity. Under the influence of divine grace they transformed the most violent passions into

instruments of zeal, accomplishing by their help stupendous works for God's glory and his kingdom among men.

St Paul's ardent and passionate nature led him to persecute the Church; but as soon as converted, he employed in preaching the Gospel the same zeal which formerly stimulated him to combat it. From being an enemy of the Church, he became its most ardent apostle.

St. Augustine whose heart was inflamed with love, had given himself up to sinful affections. But when he turned to God and found there his supreme Good, under divine grace he became a passionate lover of God's eternal beauty, regretting bitterly that he had discovered it so late.

St. Francis of Assisi, enlightened by grace, practiced self-renunciation with the same ardor with which he had formerly pursued the goods and pleasures of the world. In the lives of St. Ignatius, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis de Sales we meet similar examples of violent passions transformed by grace into heroic virtues.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Of all the enemies against which we have to contend the most dangerous are our passions. The others attack us from without and their assaults are intermittent; but our passions exist in our very nature, they assail us constantly, and we can not avoid them by flight. Moreover our victory is never complete. *Often when they seem to be crushed, says St. Bernard, they rise up again; when put to flight they return; when apparently extinguished, they flame up again.*¹

My God, to be successful in the combat against my passions, I must be helped by thy grace. Doubtless I have so often failed because I have not relied sufficiently on this powerful assistance. Instead of depending on thee I have too often trusted in myself.

Henceforth, dear Lord, I will seek the support of thy grace in the combat with my passions. As I am weak without thee, so with thee will I be strong; aided by thee, I will have nothing to fear. *Domine, ad adjuvandum me festina.*² May thy grace be ever with me,

¹ In Cant. 56

² Ps. 69²

to enlighten my mind and to strengthen my will so that, after the example of thy saints I may have the happiness to overcome my passions and make them serve my sanctification. *Therefore, O Lord, let thy grace always go before and follow me, and make me ever intent upon good works.*¹

I resolve:

1. To make my passions, especially my ruling passion, the object of particular examination;
2. To make them serve God's greater honor and glory.

*In proportion as thou dost violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make.*²

¹ IMIT. III: 55⁶

² IMIT. I: 25¹¹

XXXIII

INTERIOR PEACE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God and thank him for permitting us to share in some degree the peace which he enjoys. Peace is the object of every person's aspirations. Is not heaven its complete and perfect attainment? Our Lord wishes us to partake of his peace even during our mortal life.
- II. We will consider the following reasons why we should be eager to acquire interior peace of soul.
 1. *It is a source of joy and contentment.* This peace, unlike other things that attract us, is seated in the depths of our soul, it endures, it is the nearest we can come to the bliss of heaven.
 2. *It is a consoling sign of God's presence within us.* Interior peace is bestowed only on those who serve God faithfully. And they find therein a solace for the sacrifices which they offer to him and a testimony of their purity of soul.
 3. *It disposes our soul for the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit.* In baptism every Christian receives the Holy Ghost. That he may act upon our soul to the full extent of his desire, it is important that our soul be well established in peace.

In a peaceful soul there is calm, silence, recollection; and the action of the Holy Ghost is not lost upon it.

III. We will acknowledge that, though all desire peace, yet few know where to seek it. Their lives are troubled as a result of ambition, pride, cupidity, envy, or some other passion that perturbs their heart. We will implore the Prince of peace to enrich our souls with this precious gift of interior peace.

We will resolve:

1. To remove from our hearts the obstacles that interfere with the enjoyment of interior peace;
2. When we feel uneasiness and trouble arising in our soul to raise our minds and hearts to God and thus re-establish peace in our souls.

The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God and thank him for permitting us to share in some degree the peace which he enjoys in the contemplation of his own infinite perfections. Peace is the object of every one's aspirations, the end of all activity, the goal of all our labor, the reward we hope for, the prospect of which sustains us in the struggles and trials of life. What is heaven

but complete and perfect peace, eternally assured to those who once attain thereto? *Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours.*¹

We long for this heavenly peace which comes from God, its source which filled the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Even on earth, in the midst of strife and tribulation, where the servants of God often suffer persecution and affliction, our Lord wishes us to partake of his peace. Before leaving his apostles, he promised it to them as a precious gift. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.*² When he appeared to them after his resurrection, he saluted them with the words: *Peace be to you.*³

Let us beseech the Holy Ghost to make us understand the worth and advantages of that peace and to help us remove whatever obstacles interfere with its attainment.

¹ APOC. 14¹³

² JOHN 14²⁷

³ LUKE 24³⁶

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the following reasons why we should be eager to acquire peace of soul: it is a source of interior joy and contentment; it is a consoling sign of God's presence within us; it disposes our soul for the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit.

1. *Interior peace is a source of joy and contentment.* Other things that attract us are outside of ourselves but peace is seated in the depths of our soul whence its influence radiates to all our activities, establishing order and harmony among them. The joy that we derive from other things passes quickly away; peace endures, underlying the changing impressions that succeed one another in our soul. Peace is really the one thing that we are constantly seeking. It is the best image which we have of God's bliss and of the rest which the saints enjoy in heaven. The peace that we have is not the perfect satisfaction of all our aspirations, which will be fully gratified only in heaven, our true fatherland; but it is the calm repose of an exile who, trusting confidently in God and realizing the vanity of earthly attractions, dismisses anxious care and

disquieting worry that are produced by the incidents of life or the struggle of unruly passions. It is the nearest we can come to the bliss of heaven; *the peace of God*, as St. Paul says, *which surpasseth all understanding.*¹ This interior peace is sought by all, but only a small number procure it because most men, in place of seeking it in God, who alone can bestow it, ask it of the world, of creatures, and of their passions.

2. *Interior peace is a consoling sign of God's presence within us.* In the distribution of earthly goods God seems to make no discernment between his friends and his enemies. Indeed it sometimes appears that the latter are more favored than God's faithful children, and this is a scandal to many a weak soul. But that good which far excels all others and which they can by no means purchase, namely interior peace, is bestowed only on those who serve God faithfully. The wicked not only do not taste this peace, but they are not even aware of its existence. They do not know that beyond and above the peace which they seek in worldly pleasures there is a truer peace that

¹ PHILIP. 4⁷

the world can not give, and which we receive when God visits us with his grace. Faithful souls find therein a solace for the sacrifices which they offer to God and a testimony of their purity of heart.

Peace is the fruit of order, righteousness, and holiness, as remorse is the fruit of sin. On the other hand every time that we earnestly seek God, generously giving up what offends him and subjecting all our powers to the yoke of divine love, we find peace. God, whom we seek, comes to us and grants us his peace. *Take up my yoke upon you, . . . and you shall find rest to your souls.*¹ Says St. Paul: *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.*² The author of the *Imitation*, commenting on these words of Holy Writ, remarks: *Many are his visits to the man of interior life, and sweet the conversation that he holdeth with him; plenteous his consolation, his peace, and his familiarity.*³

Interior peace is a sign by which God reveals his presence. It is an indication of his divine life in our soul; and when we feel this peace,

¹ MATTH. 11²⁹

² ROM. 14¹⁷

³ IMIT. II:1¹

we may presume that we possess his grace and his loving friendship.

3. Interior peace disposes our soul for the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. In baptism every Christian receives God's holy Spirit who is an inexhaustible source of perfection and sanctity. He it is who, in the supernatural order, illuminates our intellect and moves our will, making us capable of holy and meritorious works. That the Holy Spirit may act upon our soul to the full extent of his desire, it is most important that our soul be well established in peace.

The Holy Ghost can act but imperfectly if at all in a soul that is in a state of agitation; for his voice, which Scripture compares to a light breeze, can not be heard. Then, too, uncontrolled affections, lack of mortification, dissipation of mind, and other disorders, which are the ordinary causes of disturbance in a soul, offer an almost insurmountable obstacle to the accomplishment of God's designs upon it and the effective activity of the Holy Ghost.

In a peaceful soul there is calm, silence, recollection. The words of the Holy Spirit are not lost upon it; order rules its powers and disposes it to obey the inspiration of his grace.

Thus, under the favoring influence of peace, the interior man progresses in virtue and holiness, a fruitful and docile instrument in the hands of God.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Interior peace is something to be highly esteemed and earnestly sought. Holy Mother Church asks God to bestow it on her children. *Grant us peace*, she prays in the mass. *Give us that peace which the world can not give*. Although everyone wants peace and regards it as supremely desirable, yet few know how to find it. The lives of most men are troubled by countless anxieties as a result of the ambition, pride, cupidity, envy or passion that perturbs their heart. They desire peace but know not where to seek it.

I have, my God, understood that interior peace can be found only in thee. Why, then, do I possess so little of this genuine peace and why is my soul so often disturbed and worried? Is it not because I have failed to seek thee with sufficient generosity and purity of purpose? My natural inclinations are very active in the pursuit of their own satisfactions,

giving rise to disturbance and uneasiness. To have peace I must be humble, but I am proud; I must mortify myself, but I am self-indulgent.

My Jesus, thou hast come into our midst *to direct our feet into the way of peace;*¹ thou art the *Prince of Peace.*² At thy birth, the angels announced thy advent as a reign of peace: *On earth peace to men.*³ To procure peace for us thou didst suffer and didst send thy Holy Spirit, the spirit of peace. Enrich our souls, we pray thee, with this precious gift and thus enable us during this life to enjoy something of the blessed peace of thy saints in heaven.

I resolve:

1. To remove from my heart the obstacles that interfere with the enjoyment of interior peace;
2. When I feel uneasiness and trouble arising in my soul, to raise my mind and heart to God and thus re-establish peace in my soul.

*The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*⁴

¹ LUKE 1⁷⁰

² Is. 9⁶

³ LUKE 2¹⁴

⁴ PHILIP. 4⁷

XXXIV

INTERIOR LIFE

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore in the incarnate Son of God, the fulness of the interior life, the source whence we ourselves must obtain it. As members of Christ's mystical body, we share in his life, and through him in the life of God.
- II. The interior life, that is, union with Jesus Christ living in us by his spirit and by his grace, is to a Christian soul what the sap is to the tree. It is hidden from observation and yet it supplies to a soul its strength, its beauty, and its fruitfulness.
 1. *The practice of the interior life gives strength to the soul.* That a soul may withstand the attacks of violent temptations and not be upturned, it must be firmly rooted in divine soil where it may grow in strength and power. Now, the sap of the soul, which provides this strength and solidity, is the interior life.
 2. *The practice of the interior life gives beauty to the soul,* which beauty is derived from the perfection of supernatural works that adorn it, and render it pleasing in the sight of God. Not only does the interior life teach us to sanctify our

ordinary acts, but it helps us to profit by every occasion to practice virtue.

3. *The practice of the interior life makes the soul fruitful in good works.* Every Christian must bear good fruit. A priest's sanctity must be communicated to others, it must be multiplied in its effects. And it is the interior life that gives to the priestly character its development and efficacy.

III. We will acknowledge how essential the interior life is for us if we are to be holy priests. We will ask our Lord and Savior to come into our soul and dwell there.

We will resolve:

1. To remove the obstacles that keep us from practicing the interior life, especially dissipation of mind and lack of mortification;
2. At the beginning of every act to renew our union with Jesus Christ.

He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore in the incarnate Son of God, the fulness of interior life, the source whence we ourselves must obtain it. *I am the life,*¹ he says in the words of the gospel. *I am come that they may have life, and may have it more*

¹ JOHN 14⁶

abundantly.¹ And again he says: *As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me.*² These words show us the economy of Christian piety. On the one hand there is Christ in substantial union with his divine Father, living in him and by him. United to the Word by reason of the hypostatic union, his adorable humanity shares in the life which God the Father imparted to his Son from all eternity. On the other hand, we are united to Christ; we form part of his mystical body, so that the apostle Paul says that *we are members of his body.*³ As members of our physical body participate in the life of the soul, so do we share in the life of Christ and through him in the life of God. This mysterious communication of life begun in baptism, is developed by every virtuous act of the Christian life, but especially by holy communion which is both its symbol and its most perfect realization. *He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me.*⁴ Our acts are holy when performed

¹ JOHN 10¹⁰

² JOHN 6⁵⁸

³ EPHES. 5³⁰

⁴ JOHN 6⁵⁸

under the influence of the spirit of Christ and in union with him. Such is the mystery of the interior life which ought to animate all Christians, especially all priests; for they are called to be Christ's representatives on earth, the instruments in whose hands he is given to the souls of the faithful.

Let us adore this life in our heavenly Father and in his incarnate Son. Let us honor its abiding presence in our blessed Mother, in the saints as also in the souls of the just on earth. Let us earnestly beseech our Savior that he may give us the grace to participate in this life.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

The interior life, that is union with Jesus Christ living in us by his spirit and his grace, is to a Christian soul what the sap is to the tree. It is hidden from observation and yet it supplies to a soul its strength, its beauty, and its fruitfulness.

1. *The practice of the interior life gives strength to the soul.* The sap, which circulates in every part of the tree, is the source of its strength. By it the roots grow and penetrate the soil, securing themselves there so

that the tree which they support can withstand the wind and the tempest.

Now, the faithful soul, planted in the garden of Christ's Church, has likewise need of strength to successfully resist the shocks and storms that threaten it. It too must encounter the force of the wind and the violence of the tempest. For temptation will assail it, discouragement will try to beat it down, sadness will oppress it, passions will arise to destroy it. That a soul may withstand these attacks and not be upturned, there must be an abundance of sap circulating in it and firmly rooting it in divine soil where it may grow in strength and power.

Now, this sap of the soul, an essential condition for its strength and solidity, is the interior life. A soul whose life is altogether exterior, subject to the impressions of the senses and the inclinations of our nature, without a solid foundation in God, has no strength to sustain it against the attacks that it must invariably encounter. It yields to the least opposition, its virtue lacks firmness; like a tree whose roots lie near the surface, or like a house built on sand, it will not withstand the violence of the tempest.

But the interior soul is deeply rooted in God. Its intimate union with God is the source of its firmness and strength. God, in whom it lives and who lives in it, dispels the darkness from its understanding, consoles it in suffering, aids it in times of attack. On this account St. Paul could say without presumption, *I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me.*¹ And again: *I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*²

2. *The practice of the interior life gives beauty to the soul.* As sap nourishes the tree, develops its branches and clothes it anew year after year with rich foliage, so the soul's beauty is derived from the perfection of its supernatural works which, like a luxuriant vegetation, developing in the sunlight of divine love, adorn it and render it pleasing in the sight of God. But only under the influence of the interior life can we produce an abundance of these works; they are its choicest

¹ PHILIP. 4¹³

² ROM. 8³⁸⁻³⁹

fruit. Inspired and directed by the spirit of Jesus Christ, to whom it is intimately united, the interior soul frequently performs supernatural acts. Acts quite insignificant, like eating, recreation, sleeping, when undertaken in the light of grace, and under the impulse of the Holy Ghost become holy and meritorious and confer further perfection on the soul.

Not only does it teach us to sanctify our ordinary acts, but it helps us to profit by every occasion to practice virtue. It readily yields to every good impulse to perform acts of humility, mortification, obedience, purity, charity, patience, and religion; capable, if need be, to make generous self-sacrifices to God and at times to practice even heroic virtue.

This is the secret of the holiness of the saints. If they have offered to the edification of the world examples of moral beauty surpassing that of ordinary men, it is because they were interior men, because they were, in the words of St. Paul: *Dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus our Lord;*¹ because

¹ ROM. 6¹¹

they nourished their souls with the living sap of grace which penetrated their whole moral being and enabled them to lead such holy lives.

3. *The practice of the interior life makes the soul fruitful in good works.* Some trees are intended to bear fruit and it is in vain that they possess strength and beauty if they are barren. The obligation to produce good works is binding on all Christians but on the priest in a greater degree than upon the rest of the faithful. He should be holy, but his sanctity must be communicated to others, it must multiply in its effects. What is the sanctifying influence which the priesthood is expected to exercise over the souls of men if not to give in the spiritual order new children to the Church and to God? The great apostle of the Gentiles, when addressing the faithful of Galatia, said to them: *My little children, of whom I am in labour again, until Christ be formed in you;*¹ and to the Corinthian Church he said: *In Christ Jesus, by the gospel, I have begotten you.*²

¹ GAL. 4¹⁹

² I COR. 4¹⁵

Undoubtedly the principal source of fruitfulness is in the priestly character and in the grace that accompanies it; but it is the interior life that gives it its development and efficacy. It is evident, then, that the duty of sanctifying others, which attaches to the sacred ministry, will be more fruitful if the divine action of Christ is more completely substituted for the action of the man. This is the privilege of the interior priest. With St. Paul he can say that it is Christ who liveth in him: when he speaks it is Christ who speaks; when he blesses it is Christ who blesses.

This it is that accounts for the wonderful fruitfulness which characterizes the ministry of holy priests. God's blessing accompanies them. If we wish our influence over souls to be powerful and our words to be effective, let us be interior priests, let us unite our action to that of Christ.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, I am convinced that I ought to become an interior priest. The spiritual teachings of the seminary constantly recall it; and I see clearly that unless I practice the

interior life I can not be a holy priest. My Lord and Savior, I earnestly desire to share in that plenitude of life which I adore in thee.

Grant, then, that my desire may become effective. Come into my soul and dwell there. Come with thy holiness so that everything in me may be detached from sin; come in the fulness of thy power so as entirely to rule over my life; come with all the treasures of thy sacred presence to perfect my ordinary acts, to increase my virtue. Let every enemy of my soul disappear before thee, and by the influence of thy Holy Spirit, let everything in me glorify thy heavenly Father.

I resolve:

1. To remove the obstacles that keep me from practicing the interior life, especially dissipation of mind and lack of mortification;
2. At the beginning of every act, to renew my union with Jesus Christ.

I am the vine; you are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.¹

¹ JOHN 15^b

XXXV

MOTIVES FOR THE PERFECTION OF ORDINARY ACTS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God whom Jesus Christ has pointed out as our model of perfection. God is perfect in all his works, in the smallest as in the greatest. Not only viewed as a whole but in its minutest detail the magnificence of the universe shows forth the glory of God. We will thank him for thus teaching us with what care we should perform all our acts.

II. Many reasons urge us to perform our ordinary acts well.

1. *All our acts are worthy of painstaking care.* They are the exercise of the noblest faculties, our intellect and our will. We have God's grace to help us perform them in a Christian manner and thus to acquire a lofty degree of perfection. Each of them, if performed for the love of God, may be made meritorious unto eternal life.

2. *Our ordinary acts considered as a whole have a great importance.* Just because they are ordinary they make up the greatest part of our life. So our perfection really depends upon them. By

negligence we lose a great deal of merit and this is the more lamentable since it requires but a slight effort to make these acts meritorious.

3. Great advantages will be derived from the perfection of our ordinary acts. Our Lord himself tells us that we will be faithful in great things if we are faithful in little things. This is how we explain the heroic virtues of the saints. Like valiant soldiers we will be invincible in the struggles that await us, only if we do well the little things that are now required of us.

III. We will humble ourselves that we are so far from deserving that praise addressed to our Lord: *He hath done all things well.* We will ask ourselves whether we have turned our common daily acts to good account, whether we have striven to make them as perfect as possible in all the circumstances that accompany them.

We will resolve:

1. Every morning and often during the day to renew the intention of performing even our ordinary acts well;
2. At night to consider how well we have performed the common acts of the day.

He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater.

I. ADORATION

Let us adore God whom Jesus Christ has pointed out as the model of perfection which

the faithful Christian should ever keep before him, to study and imitate in all things. *Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹

God is perfect in all his works, which are the expression of his wisdom, the outpouring of his love, and the reflection of his beauty. *The works of God are perfect,*² says Holy Writ. Everything in the created universe, from the greatest to the least, from the starry firmament to the smallest grain of sand, from the angels to the tiny insect, he has deemed worthy of the care of his infinite intelligence and of his activity. In all things he is great and wise and good. So, after he had completed the work of creation and had contemplated all its details, he was able to testify that it was well done. *And God saw all the things that he had made, and they were very good.*³

Not only viewed as a whole, does the magnificence of the universe compel our admiration, but in its minutest detail it is beautiful and wonderful. Order and wisdom are manifested

¹ MATTH. 5⁴⁸

² DEUT. 32⁴

³ GEN. 1³¹

throughout. The scientist who, by the aid of the microscope, studies the plant or animal organism, finds evidence of God's care and wisdom as clearly as the astronomer who observes the harmony and regularity of the heavenly bodies in their various orbits. *How great are thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom.*¹ I thank thee for thus teaching me with what care I should perform all my acts. Thy own action is the divine example that I should imitate in the least as in the greatest of my duties.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

Many reasons urge us to perform our ordinary acts well.

1. *All our acts are worthy of painstaking care.* The least acts of a rational creature, especially of a Christian, have an importance that should make us value them very highly; for they are the exercise of those noble faculties that make man the image of God. Prominent among these are the acts of the intellect, which is endowed with the power of contemplating truth, and of the will which possesses the

¹ Ps. 103²⁴

wonderful prerogative both of directing itself to what is good and of realizing it.

To help us accomplish these acts, God not only gives us that ordinary coöperation by which he sustains his creatures in the exercise of their activity, but he also showers down his grace, the precious fruit of his Son's death, a mysterious power which unites itself to our rational will, to strengthen and elevate it, to make it capable of divine activity. With this help, which is never refused and which is always efficacious if we do not oppose it, we can acquire a most surprising degree of perfection. Merely natural acts are raised to the condition of supernatural works—that is, works surpassing the power of any creature however perfect he may be.

Such actions are indeed spiritual victims worthy of being offered to God, sacrifices by which his divine majesty is more honored and glorified than by the holocausts of the Old Law. However insignificant may be their object, they can aid in developing the most sanctifying Christian virtues, they can be raised even to acts of perfect love of God which increases the divine life in our soul.

All the deeds thus offered to God are meri-

torious unto eternal life; for the smallest acts of our daily life, the performance of our little duties, apparently insignificant mortifications, the sacrifice of self-will, all these, if only we make the Holy Spirit their principle, will be rewarded in heaven. *For that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation, worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory.*¹ In the life of a Christian, nothing is common or trifling.

2. *Our ordinary actions, considered as a whole have a truly great importance.* Just because they are ordinary, they make up the greatest part of our life. Very seldom do we have an opportunity to do anything especially brilliant or to practice heroic virtue. But we are performing common actions every day and every minute of the day. They form, as it were, the very tissue of our life. So we see their real importance and the need of doing them well. Indeed, the degree of perfection that we will attain depends most of all on our fidelity in the performance of these ordinary duties. Since our life is composed so largely of common acts, it can be holy and super-

¹ II COR. 4¹⁷

natural only in so far as these acts are holy and supernatural. It is only by taking advantage of the everyday opportunities to perform acts of Christian virtues that we will acquire such a habit. This is the perfection to which God calls us. The real work of our sanctification which our Lord would have us make the great undertaking of our lives. This is the hidden treasure which we should seek with great diligence.

Furthermore, by being negligent, we deprive even our most excellent works of their meritorious value—or, at least, we greatly diminish it. If this negligence becomes habitual and affects the multitude of our countless ordinary acts, what a rich harvest of merit we will fail to reap! This loss is the more to be regretted when we consider that slight but persistent effort would have avoided it. Although the difference between a careless act and a fervent act is great in the result yet, in fact, it is very slight in the effort required to perform them.

3. Great advantages will be derived from the perfection of our ordinary actions. Jesus Christ has said: *He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater: and he that is unjust in that which is little, is*

*unjust also in that which is greater.*¹ Fidelity in the conscientious performance of our ordinary duties is intimately connected with fidelity in our most serious obligations. The great deeds that we admire in the saints were not what constituted their holiness; no, they were rather its manifestations. The virtue which they displayed had become habitual in them. It was the result of numberless obscure acts, of little sacrifices that only God's all-seeing eye perceived, of self-denials, mere trifles in themselves, but gradually strengthening the will and making it capable of the most generous effort. Otherwise, no doubt, temptation would have found them weak; like the house built on the sand, they would have been overcome by the storm.

The daily sanctification of our ordinary acts prepares us to fight the great temptations just as the regular military drills and severe discipline of the army prepare the soldier for the momentous battles of actual warfare. It is vain for us to count upon our fidelity in delicate and perilous situations if we do not show ourselves faithful in the apparently insignificant

¹ LUKE 16¹⁰

struggles of everyday life. Without a miracle of grace, one does not become a hero of sanctity suddenly.

This is a grand lesson for all the souls that God calls to practice perfection, but most especially for the seminarian who is preparing himself for the battles that await him. One day in the near future we must be soldiers of the Church. Let us not forget that our success depends upon present fidelity to the little sacrifices that are required of us.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The crowd that followed Jesus and witnessed his works cried out: *He hath done all things well.*¹ Could my superiors or my fellow-seminarians—could God, who sees and knows all, pronounce the same judgment on me?

As I reflect upon the countless multitude of little acts that make up my life, how few I see without defect of some sort, how few, whether exterior or purely interior, that possess all the marks of perfection, how few meritorious, worthy of heaven's eternal reward!

O my God, if I were presently called to

¹ MARK 7th

appear before thy judgment seat, how many meritorious works deserving heavenly reward, could I offer thee? Could I say with thy great apostle: *I have fought a good fight?*¹ Would I not have to confess days and years full of activity, indeed, but not performed with care, not performed for thee?

I resolve, therefore:

1. Every morning, on rising, and often during the day, to renew the intention of performing even my ordinary acts well;
2. At night to consider how well I have performed the common acts of the day.

*He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater.*²

¹ II TIM. 4⁷

² LUKE 16¹⁰

XXXVI

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE PERFECTION OF ORDINARY ACTS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore Jesus Christ, our divine model of perfection, living among men. The greater part of his life was taken up with ordinary acts. But he always performed them most perfectly. Each of his acts was the renewal of the offering that he made on coming into this world, and the great sacrifice of the cross was but the manifestation of a permanent interior disposition to act perfectly, to act in accordance with the will of his heavenly Father. *I do always the things that please him.*

II. We will consider the conditions needed to make an act perfect.

1. *The choice.* We must always avoid acts that are intrinsically bad and also those which become bad from the circumstances that surround them. Between two acts, both good in themselves, we should choose the more perfect; this is to conform more nearly to the will of God.

2. *The intention.* A Christian act should be performed out of love for God, to please him, to

conform to his divine will; it will not suffice that our intentions be morally good, they should be supernatural. And we should offer our acts to God through Jesus Christ, the universal mediator, as does the Church in offering all her prayers through Christ.

3. *The execution.* Everything that we do should be well done. We should be careful to neglect no circumstance of time, place or manner that will aid in perfecting our works. Our acts are the victims that we offer to God, and he would have them spotless, perfect in every respect.

III. We will humble ourselves when we realize how few of our ordinary acts possess the mark of perfection. We will confess that we seldom act from supernatural intentions, that in the performance of our ordinary acts we seldom think of pleasing God and that we generally carry them out in an imperfect manner.

We will resolve:

1. To strive to do what we perceive is most perfect;
2. To abandon bad or merely natural motives, and to act with supernatural intentions;
3. To try to accomplish in a perfect manner whatever we set out to do.

Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.

I. ADORATION

Let us contemplate Jesus, our divine model, living among men. And let us penetrate into his holy soul and ask him to show us the wonders of his interior life, those perfect dispositions that animated even the least of his acts. By far the greater part of his life was taken up with ordinary acts. During the first thirty years he lived in obscurity and occupied himself with the commonest labor, which, humanly speaking, seemed unworthy of the Incarnate Word. Although during the short period of his public ministry, he performed miracles before the eyes of men to prove his mission, even then, save for a small number of striking exceptions, the acts that filled his life, considered in themselves, had nothing about them to attract attention. He went to bed, got up, took his meals, talked familiarly with his disciples, in a word, he lived the life of other men.

Yet in all things he acted most perfectly. In every work, he sought and desired but to conform his will to the will of God, the supreme rule of all perfection. At every moment he could truly say: *I do always the things that*

*please him.*¹ Each of his acts was the renewal of the offering of himself that he made to his Father at the beginning of his life, and his last great sacrifice on Calvary was only the supreme manifestation of that interior disposition, the crowning of that uninterrupted series of immolations in which his divine heart was priest, altar, and victim. In the eyes of God, who sees and values all things justly, who attaches more importance to the dispositions that animate our actions than to their object, the obscure acts of the divine Child obedient to Mary and Joseph had as a great a value as his most striking miracles.

Let us thank our Lord for the example of his perfect interior life; and let us ask of him the grace to imitate it eagerly and faithfully.

II. CONSIDERATIONS

In the exercise of free-will we distinguish the choice, the intention, the execution. To increase our desire for perfection, let us consider the conditions needed to make our acts perfect in these three respects.

¹ JOHN 8²⁹

*darksome.*¹ The eye is here used to express the intention that prompts our acts.

Now, St. Paul tells us what must be the end of our acts if they are to be holy. *All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*² It is not enough, that we avoid positively bad motives; nor will it suffice that our intentions be morally good. If, in accordance with the counsels of Christian perfection and our holy vocation, we wish to make our deeds truly sanctified and deserving of heaven, we must aim at a higher end we must act from supernatural motives, *alive unto God*, as the great Apostle says, *in Christ Jesus our Lord.*³

A Christian act, therefore, should be performed for God. Our will can direct its acts to this end in different ways. We are acting for God when we do a work as a penance to expiate our sins, to acquire the reward that God will give, to conform our will to the divine will, or to please our Master and testify our love for him. But in some way or other

¹ MATTH. 6²²⁻²³

² COLOSS. 3¹⁷

³ ROM. 6¹¹

our acts must always be directed towards God. He must be our last end.

Then, too, our acts should be offered to God through Jesus Christ, the universal mediator. It is through him that God comes to us and that we go to God. Our homage, our prayers, our sacrifices can reach heaven only through Christ. *Spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*¹ We must live in union with him; we must act in him, through him and with him; we must place our works in his hands, as it were, so that he can make them his own and offer them to his heavenly Father. For this reason the Church offers all her prayers to God through Jesus Christ our Lord, *Per Dominum nostrum, Jesum Christum.*

3. *The execution.* In the Old Law, God would have only spotless victims. Now, our acts are the victims that he requires of us, and he would have them spotless, too, perfect in every respect. This is the meaning of St. Paul's admonition to the Colossians: *That you may walk worthy of God, in all things pleasing.*² To act in a manner worthy of God, we must

¹ I PETER 2⁵

² COLOSS. 1¹⁰

fulfil our duties, not in a mean-spirited way, not lazily, so as to seem by our carelessness to regret that we are working for God. We should act with a generous fervor. We should neglect none of the circumstances of time, place, method and order which is required for the performance of each act.

In obeying the rule, I must not be satisfied with simply omitting none of the exercises prescribed, with neglecting none of the pious practices, but I should perform them at their proper times and with care, whether it be attendance at mass or meditation, or simply a genuflection or sign of the cross. Whatever I do, should be well done. We can perform any act more or less perfectly, whether it be serving mass or saying it, whether it be making our confession or hearing the confessions of others, whether it be praying before the people and for them or only offering up our own adoration and petitions in silence, whether it be preaching a sermon or only studying quietly in our room, whether in short, it be an act in the priestly ministry or one in our daily seminary life. But if we would be perfect in the performance of our duties when we become priests, we must now acquire the habit of care and

perfection in the ordinary acts of our daily life. We can not expect to obtain these permanent dispositions and habits on the day of our ordination. The soul that desires to please God will strive to neglect none of the details that contribute to the perfection of its ordinary duties.

III. ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

O my God, the perfection which thou dost require is only this, that I perform with care and in a holy, Christian manner, the common, every-day acts that make up my life. And yet, how far I am from accomplishing this! How many of my ordinary acts lack that intrinsic goodness which is the first condition of a Christian work! How often do I violate the truth, charity, humility!

Then, too, most of my acts lack the supernatural intention which they should have. Is it not true that I generally act without any precise intention, or perhaps with intentions that should make me blush? Is not my motive frequently human respect, or mere caprice? When do I think of pleasing God and uniting myself to Jesus Christ in my recreations, my

work, my meals, my conversations? And yet without these supernatural views, an act is not Christian. But how few of my daily acts possess this quality!

How negligent and languid I am in performing my daily duties! Often I fail to make even the little effort that is needed to give my acts the perfection which they should possess. And if I begin them well, generally I perform them in an imperfect manner.

I resolve:

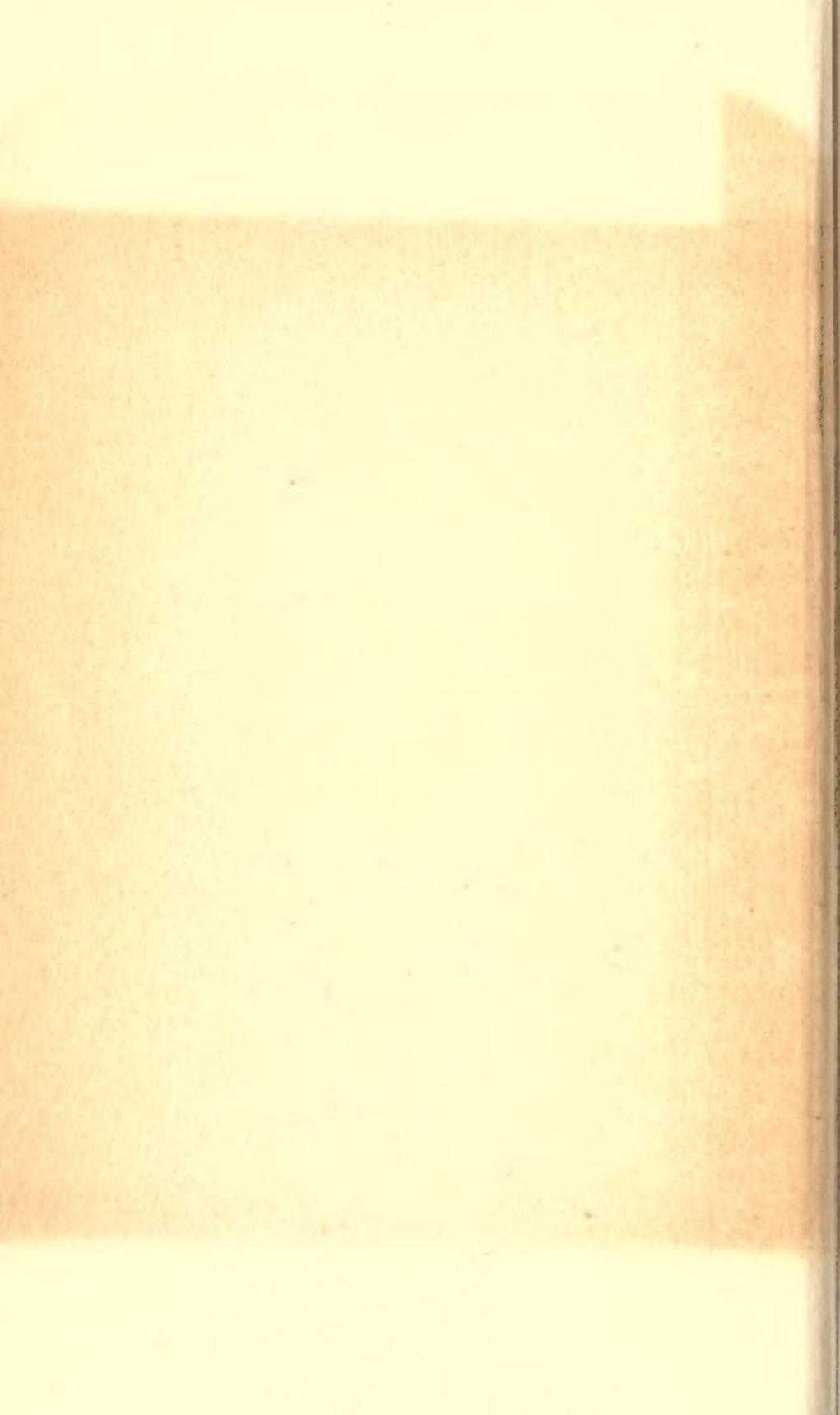
1. Always to strive to do what I perceive is the most perfect;
2. To abandon bad or merely natural motives, and to act with supernatural intentions;
3. To try to accomplish in a perfect manner whatever I set out to do.

Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.¹

¹ MATTH. 5⁴³







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